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Index to Schoolcraft's "Indian Tribes of the United States"

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FRANCES S. NICHOLS

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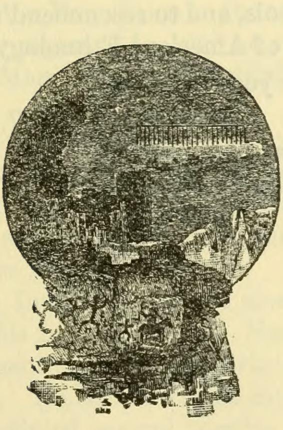

UNITED STATES
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 1954

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office
Washington 25, D. C. - Price $1.25

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Smithsonian Institution,
Bureau of American Ethnology,
Washington, D. C., January 15, 1951.

Sir: I have the honor to transmit herewith a manuscript entitled "Index to Schoolcraft's 'Indian Tribes of the United States'," compiled by Frances S. Nichols, and to recommend that it be published as a bulletin of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

Very respectfully yours,

M. W. Stirling, *Director.*

Dr. Alexander Wetmore,
Secretary, Smithsonian Institution.

INTRODUCTION

One hundred years ago, on July 22, 1850, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft submitted for publication the first volume of his treatise on the Indian tribes of the United States. This volume was issued in 1851 under the title "Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States, Collected and prepared under the direction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, per act of Congress of March 3, 1847."

Schoolcraft,[1] born on March 28, 1793, in Albany County, N. Y., attended public school in Hamilton, N. Y., and at the age of 15 entered Union College. Later he attended Middlebury College, where he showed great interest in linguistics and the natural sciences, particularly geology and mineralogy. In 1817 at Utica, N. Y., he wrote a book on glassmaking, that being the occupation of his father. His first explorations were in the Indian country of southern Missouri and Arkansas, where he studied the mineral resources in 1817–18. He published a book on the lead mines of Missouri in 1819. In 1820 he was a member of the Cass Expedition to the upper Mississippi and the Lake Superior copper region. In 1832 he made another expedition to the sources of the Mississippi, and published detailed accounts of both journeys.

His travels in out-of-the-way places led to a strong interest in the Indians. In recognition of this, in 1822 he was appointed Indian agent for the tribes of Lake Superior. In 1823 he married a quarter-blood Chippewa girl, who though educated in Europe had lived much of her life in the native way.

His interest in the Indians increased steadily and he soon made the study of Indians his full-time work. Needing data on the Indian problem, the Government made him Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Michigan in 1836. He served in this capacity until 1841, during which period he negotiated several treaties with the Chippewa, including the important treaty of March 28, 1836, whereby the United States obtained title to the northern third of the lower peninsula and the eastern half of the upper peninsula of Michigan. In 1828 he helped found the Historical Society of Michigan and in 1832 the Algic Society of Detroit.[2]

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[1] A detailed biography of Schoolcraft is to be found in "Schoolcraft-Longfellow-Hiawatha," by Chase S. Osborn and Stellanova Osborn, Lancaster, 1942.

[2] Dictionary of American Biography, vol. 16, New York, 1935.

Schoolcraft was a prolific writer and produced an impressive list of titles, mostly dealing with travel and Indian customs. Some of the more important of these are "Algic Researches," a 2-volume account of Indian mental characteristics published in 1839; "Oneota," describing the Indian history and prospects, published in 1844–45; and "Personal Memories of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes," published in 1851. These works were of a literary rather than a scientific nature. Feeling strongly that the material he had collected should be made available for scientific study, he projected an Indian encyclopedia, but this was set aside for another project which was made possible for him through Government subsidy.

In accordance with an act of Congress approved March 3, 1847, the Secretary of War appointed Schoolcraft "to collect and digest such statistics and materials as may illustrate the history, the present condition, and future prospects of the Indian tribes of the United States."

The first volume, issued in 1851, was followed by others in rapid succession, and by 1857 the publication of the entire set of six folio volumes had been completed. Copiously illustrated by Capt. Seth Eastman, this work under Government auspices was the first authoritative general compendium on the American Indian.

In compiling his material, Schoolcraft drew upon the knowledge of the leading specialists from different areas. Traders, missionaries, Indian agents, and others who had spent a great part of their lives with the Indians generously furnished him with detailed information in response to his officially sanctioned requests.

His first act in preparation for his task was to draw up a circular under the sponsorship of the Office of Indian Affairs entitled "Inquiries, Respecting the History, Present Condition, and Future Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States." The first of several editions of this circular was issued in July 1847, in accordance with the provisions of section 5, chapter 66, of the Laws of the Twenty-ninth Congress, second session, and approved March 3, 1847, which read, "*And be it further enacted*, That in aid of the means now possessed by the Department of Indian Affairs through its existing organization, there be, and hereby is, appropriated the sum of five thousand dollars to enable the said department, under the direction of the Secretary of War to collect and digest such statistics and material as may illustrate the history, the present condition, and future prospects of the Indian tribes of the United States."

The original circular recites that it was addressed to four classes of individuals, namely, "I. Persons holding positions under the department, who are believed to have it in their power to impart much practical information respecting the tribes who are, respectively, under their charge. II. Persons who have retired from similar situations, travelers in the Indian Territory, or partners and factors on the American frontiers. III. Men of learning or research who have perused the best writers on the subject and who may feel willing to communicate the results of their reading or reflections. IV. Teachers and missionaries to the aborigines."

The circular closes with an expression of the "anxiety which is felt to give the materials collected the character of entire authenticity, and to be apprised of any erroneous views in the actual manners and customs, character, and condition of our Indian tribes which may have been promulgated. The Government, it is believed, owes it to itself to originate a body of facts on this subject of an entirely authentic character, from which the race at large may be correctly judged by all classes of citizens, and its policy respecting the tribes under its guardianship, and its treatment of them, properly understood and appreciated."

The 348 inquiries in the circular embrace the history (and archeology), the tribal organization, the religion, the manners and customs, the intellectual capacity and character, the present condition, the future prospects, and the language, of the Indian tribes of the United States.[3]

In 1851, as stated above, the first of the six volumes of "Historical and Statistical Information" appeared. This important work, which did so much to crystallize the thinking of students of the American Indian during the formative years of anthropology in this country, has fallen into general disuse as a reference work during the present generation. This has been due in part to the general supposition that its contents, particularly as to theory, have become antiquated, and also to the fact that the huge bulk of material is badly organized. Lacking an index, the task of looking up particular topics has tended to frighten away would-be researchers.

Despite its faults, this opus will always remain a mine of source material. At the time of its compilation, aboriginal culture in the United States, although rapidly disintegrating, was still a living, vital reality. This was particularly true of the tribes west of the Mississippi, which were just beginning to feel the effects of the encroachment of white civilization. The bulk of the material reflects the direct observations of intelligent men who knew the Indians through long contact with them.

Mrs. Nichols, whose long experience on the editorial staff of the Bureau of American Ethnology well fitted her for the task, is to be congratulated for completing the tedious chore of indexing these books. It is to be hoped that the publication of this index will restore to more general use this now neglected classic on the American Indians.

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[3] Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri, by Edwin Thompson Denig, edited by J. N. B. Hewitt, 46th Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethonology, Washington, 1930.

Matthew W. Stirling,
Director, Bureau of American Ethnology.

INDEX TO SCHOOLCRAFT'S "INDIAN TRIBES OF THE UNITED STATES"

Compiled by Frances S. Nichols

[Roman numerals, i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi, indicate volume numbers]

A

- Abacactes, brief account of, iii, 511
- Abacaries, brief account of, iii, 511
- Abacooche. *See* Coosa River.
- Aba-inka, Choctaw name for Supreme Being, iii, 511; v, 72
- Abanakis. *See* Abnaki.
- Abanes, brief account of, iii, 511
- Abankoui, brief account of, iii, 511
- Abbacoochees, a Creek town, v, 262.
- Abbatotine. *See* Ambatawwoots.
- Abbetikis. *See* Abittibi.
- Abbinojee, term for infant, ii, 63
- Abbot and Deforest, murder of, i, 217
- Abbott, Thomas J., Creek census taken by, iv, 579–581
- Abecas (Abeicas), a Tombigbee River band, iii, 512
- Abegiras, mission of, iii, 513
- Abel, Mr., interpreter, iii, 161
- Abenaki language. *See* Abnaki language.
- Abenakies, Abenakis, Abenaquis. *See* Abnaki.
- Abercrombie, Gen., vi, 226, 233
- Abernaquis, variant spelling of Abenaquis, iii, 513
  - *See also* Abnaki.
- Abert, Col. John J., i, 220; ii, 95, 99
- Abert, J. W., reference to report of, iii, 403
- Abert, Lt., information furnished by, i, 198
- Abetto, Chief, vi, 255
- Abihka. *See* Abecas.
- Abikudshi. *See* Abbacoochees; Arbiccoochee.
- Abinakee, Abinakies, Abinakis, Abinaqui. *See* Abnaki.
- Abipones, account of, iii, 513
- Abiquico pueblo, change in, v, 689
- Abiquin, possibly Yuque-Yunque, iv, 39
- Abiquiu. *See* Abiquico; Abiquin.
- Abisca, a region of Peru, iii, 513
- Abitanis, a mountain of Peru, iii, 513
- Abitegas, brief description of, iii, 513
- Abittibi (Abbetikis, Tabittikis), iii, 555, 556
  - totem, iii, 555, 556
- Abittibi Lake, a Canadian lake, iii, 514
- Abnaki (Abanakis, Abenakis, Abenaquis, Abinakee, Abinakies, Abinakis, Abinaquis, Abonakies), iii, 553; vi, 156
  - account of, iii, 512–513
  - at Braddock's defeat, vi, 218
  - classification, iii, 401
  - derivation of name, iii, 512–513; vi, 174
  - district inhabited by, iii, 512, 559; iv, 542; vi, 714
  - divisions, iii, 512
  - hunting grounds, vi, 714
  - migrations, vi, 734
  - missionary work among, vi, 735, 738
  - other names for, vi, 174
  - population, vi, 270
  - possible application of name, vi, 104
  - relations with English, vi, 173–175
  - relations with French, v, 218
  - totems, iii, 553
  - warriors, number of, iii, 553, 559; vi, 270, 714
  - *See also* Obunegos; Opanangoes; Tarratines; Wabanakee.

- Abnaki (Abenaki) language, affinities, III, 512
  - publications in, IV, 541–542
  - vocabulary, III, 512
  - *See also* Openango language.
- Abo, or Abou, discussion of term, III, 514
- Aboinug (Abwoin, Abwoinug), discussion of name, III, 515
  - enemies of, II, 136, 141; V, 39
  - synonym of Sioux, V, 39
  - *See also* Dakota.
- Abonakies. *See* Abnaki.
- Aborigines. *See* Indians.
- Abortion, among the Dacotas, I, 252
  - among the Kenistenos, V, 167
- Abraham (Little Abraham), Chief, ability of, VI, 281
  - brief account of, III, 514
  - succession, to chieftaincy, IV, 481
- Absarokas (Absarokes), VI, 686
  - population of, I, 257, 523; VI, 686
  - relation to Wattasoons, III, 251
  - *See also* Crow Indians; Upsarokas.
- Absarokes. *See* Absarokas.
- Absecon, derivation of name, III, 514–515
- Abstinence, Indian powers of, III, 211
- Abucees, a Quito settlement, III, 515
- Abwoin, Abwoinug. *See* Aboinug.
- Abyssinians, hair of, IV, 363–364
- Acalhuas (Acolhuans), V, 106
  - arrival of, in Mexico, III, 515
  - idol of, VI, 641
  - knowledge of metals, VI, 600
  - place in Mexican chronology, III, 515
  - Valley of Mexico occupied by, V, 95; VI, 596, 742
  - *See also* Tezcocans.
- Acalhuas and Chichemecas, dynasty of, V, 96
- Acamuchitlan, settlement of, III, 515
- Acantepec, settlement of, III, 515
- Acari, brief description of, III, 515
- Acatepec, settlements called, III, 516
- Acatl, a day symbol, III, 516
- Acatlan, settlement of, III, 516
- Acaxee Indians, account of, III, 516
- Acazingo, population, III, 516
- Accocesaws, description, III, 516
- Accohanocs, brief account of, III, 517
  - location, VI, 131
- Accomacs (Accomacks), brief account of, III, 517; V, 36
  - name, meaning of, III, 517; VI, 104
  - territory occupied by, VI, 131
- Accomentas. *See* Accominta.
- Accominta (Accomentas, Accominticus), a Pawtucket division, III, 517
  - listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
- Accominticus. *See* Accominta.
- Accouchement. *See* Childbirth.
- Accoutrements, description, III, 69
- Achafalaya, derivation of name, III, 517
- Achagua, description, III, 517
- Achalaque group (Achalaques, Achelaque), an ethnic group, II, 343
  - De Soto in territory of, II, 35
  - map showing location, II, 28
  - modern Cherokees, II, 35; III, 41; V, 42, 482
  - one of seven generic families, II, 33
- Achaque, totem of, III, 554
- Achelaque. *See* Achalaque group.
- Achquanchicola, meaning of name, III, 517
- Achsissaghecs, Iroquois name for Mississagies, III, 517
- Acolhuans. *See* Acalhuas; Tezcocans.
- Acoma (Acome), III, 304; IV, 77, 216; VI, 686
  - Acuco identified as, IV, 26, 33, 39
  - arrival of Spaniards, IV, 26, 32
  - language, V, 689
  - method of defense, IV, 26
  - population, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 686, 709
  - sketch of, IV, 26
- Acome. *See* Acoma.
- Acorns, use as food, III, 146; V, 649
- Acquinoshionee (Acwinoshioni, Akquinashioni), VI, 298
  - name, meaning of, III, 517, 532
    - for the Six Nations, VI, 298
    - for the Iroquois Confederacy, III, 517, VI, 323
- Actopan, Othomi settlement of, III, 517
- Acuco, identified as Acoma, IV, 26, 33, 39
- Acuera, III, 57
  - reply to De Soto, III, 37–38; VI, 63
- A-cu-lah, Pecos name for Cicuyé, IV, 35
- Acutitlan, a Mexican settlement, III, 518
- Acwinoshioni. *See* Acquinoshionee.

- Adaes. *See* Adai.
- Adai (Adaes, Adaize, Addees, Addies, Adees), VI, 686
  - brief account of, III, 518
  - country occupied by, III, 585, 596
  - listed as a linguistic family, III, 402
  - population, III, 585, 596; VI, 686
- Adair, Andrew, murder of, IV, 471
- Adair, James, criticism of work of, V, 82
  - discussion of theory of, V, 86–88
  - quoted on celestial cherubim, V, 74
- Adair, Washington, murder of, IV, 471
- Adaize. *See* Adai.
- Adams, President John Quincy, state of Indian tribes under, VI, 346–347, 418–427
- Adario, activities, III, 518–520; V, 521–524
  - character, V, 521–522
- Adarondak. *See* Adirondacks.
- Addees, Addies, Adees. *See* Adai.
- Adic, or Adik, a mythological character, III, 520
- Adikumaig, etymology of the word, III, 520
- Adirondacks (Adarondak), a name for the Algonquins, III, 521; IV, 198, 204; V, 40, 137
  - Iroquois war on, IV, 382; VI, 188
  - name, meaning of, IV, 384; V, 40, 137
  - population, VI, 270
  - warriors, number of, VI, 270
  - *See also* Orondocks.
- Adoles, a settlement of the Saliva nation, III, 521
- Adoption, as a compliment, III, 189–190, 195
  - of captives, III, 186, 189; IV, 53
- Adultery, punishment for, among the Creeks, V, 269, 273
- Adze, illustrations of, II, 516
  - use of, II, 514
- Aegakötchëising (Ottawa), census of, I, 478–487
- Affagoula, a Louisiana village, III, 521
- Agaces, account of, III, 521
- Agahonna, reference to, VI, 200
- Agamentigus, application of the name, III, 521
- Agamuntic, a Maine lake, III, 521
- Agaraits, a Trinity River village, III, 139
- Agariata, Chief, brief account of, III, 521
- Agassiz, Louis, reference to, IV, 138, 190
- Agawam tribe, country occupied by, III, 521; V, 221
  - origin of name, V, 221
  - relations with the Pennacook, V, 222
- Aggodagada, the giant, story of, III, 521
- Agiocochook, aboriginal name for White Mountains, III, 521
- Agnoles, country occupied by, III, 522
- Agouhanna, Chief, VI, 57
- Agreskoe (Areskoui), Iroquois god of war, III, 522, 536
- Agrias, identification of, III, 522
- Agriculture, I, 54–61
  - among Choctaws and Chickasaws, VI, 526
  - among Moquis, IV, 86
  - among Navajos, IV, 212
  - among Ojibwas, II, 137
  - among Oregon Indians, III, 222
  - at time of discovery of America, VI, 564
  - at Zuñi, VI, 221
  - implements used in, V, 106
  - Indian attitude toward, II, 519; III, 222
  - Indians unfitted for, I, 223
  - in the Mississippi Valley, I, 50, 51
  - lack of, among Snake Indians, I, 211
  - main products, III, 270; IV, 665
  - results of adoption, in Peru and Mexico, V, 392
  - *See also* Corn; Food; Garden-beds; Tobacco.
- Aguilusco, settlement of, III, 522
- Aguirre, cited on head flattening, II, 328
- Agustine, Michael, treaty concluded by, V, 677
- Ahachae, a band of Osages, IV, 406
- Ahahawa (Ahahaways, Ahahways), III, 514
  - brief account of, III, 250–251
  - Crow band, III, 522
  - location, III, 522
  - population, III, 522
  - *See also* Wattasoons.
- Ahahaways. *See* Ahahawa.
- Ahahways. *See* Ahahawa.
- Ahahwĕh. *See* Ah-auh-wauk family.
- Ahapopka, a Florida lake, III, 522
- Ahasimus, an Indian place name, III, 522

Ah-auh-wauk (Ah-awh-wauk) family, characteristics, II, 150
  chief belonging to, II, 142
Ah-awk-wauk. *See* Ah-auh-wauk.
Ahchessee, chief of the Yuquache, VI, 702
Ahealt. *See* Port Stuart Indians.
A-hel-tah, a Trinity River village, III, 139
Ah-hoo-zeeb-kaw's Band, census of, I, 498–507
Ah loc e yoholo of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Ah-mau-dah-kas (Ah-nau-dah-kas), dwellings, V, 682
  language, V, 682
  origin tradition, V, 682
  population, V, 702
  See also Anadarko.
Ah-nau-dah-kas. *See* Ah-mau-dah-kas.
Ahnenin, classification of, III, 402
Ahoma tribe, brief account of, III, 522
Ahouandate, a name for the Wyandots, III, 522
Ahquedauken, origin of name, V, 225
  use of name, V, 226
Ahrendah-ronons. *See* Arendahronons.
Ahtena. *See* Atnah.
Ahuacatlan, name of Axtec settlements, III, 522
Ah-wash-tes, a tribe of Dolores Mission, II, 506
Ahwaste. *See* Ah-wash-tes.
Aiches, a Texas settlement, III, 522
Aijoues (Ajoues), estimate of warriors of, III, 559
  French name for Iowas, III, 256
  identification, III, 522
  location, III, 559
  See also Iowas.
Aingodon, an ancient sorcerer, III, 522
Ais, a mythological character, III, 523
Aisemid, a mythological character, III, 523
Aishkibugikozh, Chief, derivation of name, III, 523
  See also Flat-mouth.
Aishkwaigonabee, Chief, band of, described, III, 523
Aishquagonabi, an Ottowa chief, VI, 386
Aissance, noted chief of Red Lake band, II, 165
Ajoues. *See* Aijoues.
Akansa, synonym of Arkansas (q. v.), III, 537
Akeek, the Algonquin cooking pot, I, 81–82
Akosa's band, census, I, 458–467
  description, III, 524
Akquinashioni. *See* Acquinoshionee.
Akwinoshioni band, VI, 138
Alabaha River, brief description of, V, 256
Alabama, Fort (Alibamo), attack on, III, 46
  description, IV, 124
Alabama language, a Creek dialect, I, 268
Alabama River, description, V, 257
Alabama River region, Indians of, VI 32
Alabama (State), admission to the Union, VI, 393
  Indian lands in, III, 584, 586
  Indian population, III, 584, 586; V, 480, 481
  name, meaning of, III, 511, 524
  population and area, IV, 610
Alabamas (Alibamous, Alibamu), VI, 686
  account of, III, 524
  Appalachian tribe, III, 29; V, 42
  classification, II, 344; III, 401, 404
  conquered by Muscogees, II, 32; V, 259
  Creek Nation, part of the, III, 559; V, 115, 260
  early name of the Creeks, VI, 333
  linguistic relations, III, 404
  merged into Creeks, V, 259; VI, 686
  origin myth, I, 266
  population, III, 399, 524
  warriors, estimate of, III, 557, 559
Alabamas (village), a Creek town, V, 262
Alabamians, Muscogee name for themselves, I, 266; II, 32
Alachees, conquered by Muscogees, II, 32
Alachua, a Florida place name, III, 524
Alachuas. *See* Alachees; Lotchnoay band.
Alafiers, Maj. Dade ambushed by, VI, 469

- Alagonkins, dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  - hunting grounds, vi, 714
  - population, vi, 714
- Alapirire, mission of Barcelona Province, iv, 556
- Alaska, brief discussion of name, iii, 524
- Albany, N. Y., Hendrick Hudson at site of, vi, 101
- Albertson, Capt. Isaac, Chickasaw division of, i, 508
- Albinos, among American Indians, iii, 393; iv, 81, 221
- Alcanic type, ii, 45
- Alcantara, Pedro, information furnished by, ii, 506
  - vocabulary by, ii, 494
- Alcedo, population estimates by, v, 34
- Alcoholic liquors, among Bonacks and Shoshonees, i, 228
  - effect of introduction, i, 434, 435; ii, 550; iii, 212; vi, 556–557, 562
  - Indian neutrality bought with, v, 190
  - revolt against law concerning, iv, 471–472
  - *See also* Intoxication; Whiskey trade.
- Alempigon, identification of name, iii, 524
- Alewives, habits, in New England rivers, v, 225–226
- Alexander, vi, 173
  - origin of name, vi, 115
  - son of Massasoit, vi, 103
- Alexandria, arrival of Gen. Braddock at, vi, 215–216
- Algic, use of term, iii, 524
- Algics, Iroquois defeated by, vi, 201
- Algomeequin (Algomequin), name for Algonquins (q. v.), i, 306; v, 38
- Algonac village, derivation of name, iii, 524
- Algonkin. *See* Alagonkins.
- Algonkin-Lenapee, use of term, i, 197
- Algonkins, a linguistic family, iii, 401, 402
  - *See also* Algonquin family.
- Algonquian stock. *See* Algonquin family; Algonquins.
- Algonquin family (group, stock, tribes), attitude of, toward the French, vi, 213, 242
  - brief description, vi, 96
  - census returns, i, 458–497
  - country occupied by, v, 38–40; vi, 31, 32–33
  - cranial capacity, ii, 335; vi, 574
  - derivation of various names, v, 38
  - divisions, i, 458, 478, 488; v, 144–146
  - French influence with, vi, 213
  - gradual extinction, v, 481
  - identified by moccasins, iii, 66
  - map showing location of, ii, 28
  - migration, line of, v, 39–42
    - period of, v, 39
  - name for themselves, vi, 573
  - of Mississippi Valley, list of, v, 40–41
  - one of seven generic families, i, 33, 343
  - origin and division, iv, 148
  - origin of name, v, 38, 143–144
  - population, i, 523
  - position on Great Lakes, vi, 204
  - tribes, iii, 591–593; v, 41
    - adopting Christianity, v, 504
  - *See also* Algonquins.
- Algonquin language, bibliography, iv, 529–542
  - characteristics, v, 676
  - circuit followed by, v, 146
  - compounding of words in, iv, 372–380
  - dialects, ii, 341
  - general discussion, vi, 673–684
  - geographical names in, with derivation, iv, 379–380
  - grammatical structure, ii, 353–442
  - note on, iv, 554
  - orthographical peculiarity, vi, 174
  - plan of thought in, vi, 673–674
  - preservation, iii, 96
  - range, ii, 36
  - short list of words in, v, 38
  - verb "to hunt" in, vi, 552
  - vocabularies, ii, 458–481
  - words of, incorporated into English, vi, 103
- Algonquinensis, use of term, iii, 524

Algonquins, III, 553; VI, 686
  alliance with Menominie, I, 304
  antiquities, I, 66–69
  application of term, II, 36
  bands in Hudson Valley, VI, 147
  beliefs concerning the soul, I, 33, 39
  burial customs, V, 81
  canoe building, II, 513
  circle of occupation, IV, 529
  colonial changes affecting, VI, 236
  comparison with Mexicans, V, 107
  cooking vessels, I, 81
  country occupied by, I, 196–197, 306; III, 559; VI, 200, 206
  cranial capacity, II, 332; V, 244
  discussion of supremacy, VI, 148
  fabric made by, IV, 139
  inscription made by, I, 107
  intertribal relations, VI, 199
  migrations, I, 306
  mythology and superstitions, VI, 658–663
  names of tribes, VI, 32–33
  number in New York, I, 524
    in Ohio Valley, IV, 605–606
  numerical system, V, 712
  origin and meaning of name, I, 197, 306; II, 358
  ossuary of, I, 102
  physical characteristics, V, 243–244; VI, 42
  population, VI, 270, 272, 275, 686
  pottery, I, 81–82
  relations with French, V, 146–147, 647
  religion, I, 72; III, 511
  stature, IV, 349
  supreme deity of, III, 511
  totems, III, 553
  warriors, number of, III, 553, 559; VI, 270
  See also Algonkins; Algonquin family; Algonquins, western.
Algonquins, western, census, I, 488–497
  divisions, I, 488
  geographical position, I, 488
  Lenapee subtype, chiefly of, I, 488
Aliatan, a synonym of Itan, III, 524
  See also Ietan.
Alibamo, a synonym of Alabama (q. v.), II, 34
Alibamous. *See* Alabamas.
Alibamu. *See* Alabamas.
Aliche, a Caddo band, III, 524
Alipkonck, location of village, III, 525
Allabamous (fort), erection, V, 278
Allakaweah Indians, population, III, 525
  territory occupied by, III, 525
  See also Paunch Indians.
Allca, a Peruvian race, III, 525
Allegans (Alleghans), III, 525; VI, 35
  conquered by Senecas, IV, 606
  country occupied by, VI, 176
  forced from Ohio Valley, VI, 176
  history, V, 133–135
  Lenni Lenapees preceded by, V, 99
  migration tradition, V, 98
  name, origin of, III, 525
  other names for, V, 133
  period on Alleghany River, IV, 172
  synonym of Alleghany nation, III, 525
  tradition concerning, V, 134
  traditional home, IV, 606
  traditional name of mound-builders, IV, 137
  See also Allegewi; Cherokee.
Allegewi (Allegewy, Alleghewi, Alligewi), a synonym of Allegans, V, 133; VI, 176
  burial mounds, IV, 137
  driven off by Six Nations, II, 37
  fortifications attributed to, IV, 136
  identified as Cherokees, VI, 47
  synonym of Alleghany nation, III, 525
  See also Allegans; Cherokee.
Allegewi language, last remaining words of, VI, 176–177
Alleghans. *See* Allegans.
Alleghany, Onondagas at, VI, 706
  Senecas at, VI, 706
Alleghany Mountains, discussion of name of, III, 525; IV, 137, 380; V, 133, 595
Alleghany Reservation, census, VI, 690
  location of, VI, 690
Alleghany (Allegany) River, discussion of name, IV, 137, 380; V, 133, 595; VI, 176
  pictographs from, IV, 172–173
  various names for, IV, 172

Allegory, Indian, comment on, I, 316
  discussion, III, 313–314
  example, I, 327
  See also Tales.
Allen, Lt. James, I, 144, 145, 148
  map made by, IV, 189
Alliances, tribal, proofs of, I, 268
  See also Confederacy.
Alligator, Chief, VI, 469
Alligator Indians, skirmishes with, VI, 359–360
Allouez (Alloez), Father Claude, contact with Ojibwas, II, 147
  missionary labors, V, 647–648; VI, 734
Almochico (Almouchico), application of name, III, 525, 537–538; VI, 104
Almouchico. *See* Almochico.
Alphabet, Cherokee. *See* Cherokee alphabet.
Alphabetic characters, antiquity of, I, 343, 344
Alsea. *See* Ulseahs.
Alsethic type, Noachin type derived from, II, 45
Al-tah-mos, a Dolores Mission tribe, II, 506
Altamaha River, Creeks located on, VI, 186, 370
  etymology of name, III, 525
Altamaha River region, Indians of, VI, 32
Altar-mounds, devotional element shown in, IV, 126
Altars, buried in mounds, I, 73
  pipes found on, I, 52, 73
  See also Altar-mounds.
Althmack, Lawrence, Lapland drum owned by, I, 427
Alvarado, Hernando de, expedition led by, IV, 26–27
  reference to massacre ordered by, III, 23
Alvord, Maj. B., Oregon Indians described by, V, 651
Amacaches, a Brazilian tribe, III, 525
Amahami. *See* Ahahawa; Wattasoons.
Amaikiara. *See* Eh-nek.
Amalecites (Amalistes), location, III, 558, 559
  population, III, 525
  warriors, number of, III, 553, 559
  See also Malecite.
Amalistes. *See* Amalecites.
Amariscoggins (Ameriscoggins), an Abenaki division, III, 512
  derivation of name, V, 223
  location, V, 223
  members of Pennacook Confederacy, V, 223
  See also Arosaguntacook.
Amatakaules, meaning of name, III, 525
Ambatawwoots (Ambawtamoot, Ambawtawoots), an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
  meaning of name, III, 525
  population, II, 28
Ambawtamoot, Ambawtawoots. *See* Ambatawwoots.
Amboy, derivation of name, III, 526
Amelicks, number of warriors, III, 553
  See also Amalecites.
Amenorrhoea, treatment, IV, 513
American Antiquarian Society, investigations made by, VI, 601
American Baptist Home Mission Society, children instructed by, V, 699
American Baptist Home Missionary Society, data on missions of, VI, 740
American Baptist Missionary Union, missions, VI, 738
  work, V, 698
American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, III, 512; VI, 517
  missions, VI, 738
  work among Indians, V, 502, 503
American Board of Foreign Missions, reference to, V, 188
American Continent, earliest knowledge of, V, 27
American [Evangelical] Missionary Association, work of, among Indians, V, 502, 503
American Fur Co., organization of, VI, 398
American Indian Missionary Association, data on missions of, VI, 740
  work, V, 502, 503

American Indians. *See* Indians.
American Missionary Association, data on missions of, vi, 740
Americans, use of term, ii, 25–26
Ameriscoggins. *See* Amariscoggins.
Amherst, Gen. [Sir Jeffrey], ii, 241; vi, 237
  aid asked of, vi, 239, 240
  campaign planned by, vi, 252, 259
  frontier forts relieved by, vi, 247
  successes, vi, 233–234
Amhertsburg, headquarters of Tecumseh, vi, 362
Amicways, derivation of name, iii, 526
  See also Amikwa.
Amidas, Philip, voyage made by, vi, 83–84
Amik, a Chippewa mythological name, iii, 526
Amik, Chief, vi, 261
Amikiminis, derivation of name, iii, 526
Amikouis, French name for Dionondaties, iii, 526
Amikwa. *See* Amicways; Necariages; Ounikanes.
Amikwuk, identification, iii, 526
Amixocores, a Brazilian nation, iii, 526
Amola, meaning of name, iii, 526
Amonoosuck, name of two rivers, iii, 526
Amoskeag, vi, 173
  derivation and meaning of name, iii, 526; v, 217, 221–222; 223; vi, 174
  location, v, 221
  other names for, v, 234
  Pennacook village, v, 230
  subservient to Pennacooks, v, 222
  See also Namaoskeag; Namaske; Naumkeag.
Amoskeag Falls, Indians at, v, 217
  location, v, 221
  See also Amoskeag.
Ampones, a Paraguay tribe, iii, 526–527
Amputation, Dacota attitude toward, i, 254
  not practiced by Creeks, i, 274
Amulets, illustrations of, i, 105; ii, 90; vi, 603
  ornaments worn as, iii, 69
  See also Charms.
Anacoana, Queen (Annacoand), iii, 23; vi, 36, 615
  brief account of, iii, 527
  song of, ii, 309, 312
  story of, ii, 309–312
Anadahkas, Anadahkoes, Anadakas, An-a-dak-kas. *See* Anadarko.
Anadarko (Anadahkas, Anadahkoes, Anadakas, Anadakkas), vi, 686
  language, v, 712
  location, vi, 704
  population, i, 518; vi, 686, 704, 708
  relations with Texans, v, 712
  See also Ah-mau-dah-kas; Andaicos; Madahas; Nandakoes.
Anahuac, the Valley of Mexico, iii, 527
  Aztec arrival at, v, 61
  reference to traditions of, v, 106
Anastasio, a minor chief of the Cuchans, ii, 112
Anasuguntakook, country occupied by, iii, 527
  See also Arosaguntacook.
Anatomy, Chinese knowledge of, iv, 506–507
  Dacota knowledge of, i, 249
  Indian knowledge of, iv, 241–242, 501–502, 505–506
Ancamares, a Brazilian tribe, iii, 527
Ance's band, Oak Point, census of, i, 458–467
Ancestors, beliefs concerning, i, 39
  oriental deification of, v, 406
  veneration for, v, 92, 93, 104
Andachkhroh, town of the Neutral Nation, iv, 206, 207
An-dag-weos. *See* Andaigweos.
Andaicos (Anduicos), iii, 403
  population, iii, 635; vi, 699
  See also Anadarko.
Andaigweos, Chief (An-dag-weos), derivation of name, iii, 527
  friend of the Whites, ii, 150
Andasta, Chief, kindness to French, vi, 73
Andastaka, synonym of Andastes (q. v.)
Andastes (Andastakas), iv, 200; vi, 35
  account of, iii, 527; vi, 137–141
  close of history, vi, 141
  conquered by Senecas, iv, 606
  country occupied by, vi, 137, 138, 149

Andastes (Andastakas)—Continued
  expelled from Lake Erie shore, III, 290
  forts built by, V, 109
  identified as Conestogues, VI, 138
  identified as Susquehannocks, VI, 149
  in Erie league, II, 344
  synonyms of name, VI, 137, 138, 139
  temporary stay in Ohio Valley, V, 41
  war with Mohawks, VI, 142
  war with Senecas, VI, 144, 148
  war on, by Iroquois, V, 137
  See also Conestogo.
Andastoe, synonym of Andastes (q. v.)
Andastogué, synonym of Andastes (q. v.)
Andover, attacked by Indians, VI, 164
Andros, Dr. F., IV, 243
  mistake made by, IV, 518
  report on medical practices, III, 497–498
Anduicos. *See* Andaicos.
Anee-me-kees, treatment of wounds, IV, 514
Angel, W. G., petition signed by, III, 618
  reports by, II, 538; IV, 603; VI, 694
Anhazea, inhabitants briefly described, II, 32
Aniez, French name for the Mohawks (q. v.), III, 527
Animal life. *See* Animals; Game.
Animals, a cause of sickness, II, 175, 180
  associated with medicine, II, 224
  attitude toward, V, 420
  beliefs concerning, III, 229–230, 520; V, 408; VI, 658
  extinct, remains of, III, 272; V, 669
  fur bearing, disappearance of, III, 208
  of California, described, III, 205
  of the Apache country, V, 209
  prehistoric, use of bones, II, 175, 179
  See also Animals, domestic; Antelope; Bear; Beaver; Buffalo; Deer; Dogs; Fur; Game; Horses; Hunting customs; Skins; Skin dressing.
Animals, domestic, absence, VI, 564
  introduction, VI, 616–617
Anker-howhitch, at Utah peace council, IV, 596
Anklet, illustration of, III, 69
Annacioris, a Brazilian tribe, III, 527
Annacoand. *See* Anacoana.
Annamosing, meaning of the name, III, 527
Annawon, Philip's war captain, VI, 171
Annencraos, Seneca chief, killed by the Eries, III, 289
Annimikeens (Annimikens), brief account of, III, 527
  encounter with bear, II, 55
Annuities, Indian, II, 558, 584–589
  anticipation of, II, 531
  beginning of system, VI, 320
  Creek, statement of, IV, 571
  effect, I, 279, 434–435; II, 548; V, 482
  of salt, II, 589
  paid to the Winnebagoes, III, 282
  recommendations concerning, II, 191, 193, 531
  right of Indians to, III, 615
Annutteligo, III, 527
Anowara (The Turtle), III, 527–528
Antalis, a tribe of Chile, III, 528
Antelope, hunting of, IV, 60
Antiquities, I, 44–129; II, 83–91; III, 73–90; IV, 113–175; V, 85–117
  architectural, area of, I, 67
  arts indicated by, I, 70–72
  attitude toward, of early explorers, V, 108, 109
  comparisons, V, 105–117
  conclusions drawn from, IV, 658
  Congaree, IV, 155–169, 170–172
    illustrated, VI, 179
  importance of investigation, I, 108
  Indian, confused with French, V, 110
  in relation to geological changes, V, 111
  intrusive, V, 85–86, 116
  lack of, among California Indians, IV, 226
  Mexican, VI, 576–589
    illustrations of, VI, 576–591, 636, 638, 644
  Muscogee, V, 660
  north of Lake Superior, I, 66–67
  of Cunningham's Island, illustrated, II, 84–90

Antiquities—Continued
  of Florida, ɪɪ, 83–84
  of Lake Erie, ɪɪ, 85–88
  of New Hampshire, ɪv, 175
  of New York, ɪv, 174; v, 666–674
    illustrated, vɪ, 611
  of Ohio, v, 113, 660–662, 665–666
  of Oregon coast, vɪ, 612–613
  of the Algonquins, ɪ, 66–69
  of two epochs, v, 99
  parallel with arts and customs, v, 115
  Peruvian, v, 89–95, 657–659
    illustrations of, v, 93, 94; vɪ, 593
  South Carolina, ɪɪ, 88–89
    illustrated, ɪɪ, 90; vɪ, 74
  west of the Alleghanies, vɪ, 595–603
  See also Altars; Fortifications; Garden beds; Inscriptions; Mines; Mounds; Newport ruin; Ossuaries; Pictographs; Ruins.
Antiquity of Indian tribes, v, 69–70, 87–88
Anton, Chief, ɪɪ, 111, 112
Aondironons, town of, taken by Senecas, ɪv, 201, 208
Aouas, De Vaca's name for Iowas (q. v.), ɪɪ, 37
Apacahand, Chief, also called White Eyes (q. v.), ɪɪɪ, 528
Apache (Apachee) language, v, 202–203
  affiliates, v, 211
  and Athapascan, analogies between, v, 173
  connection with Hebrew, v, 686
  meager nature of, v, 587
  vocabulary, v, 202, 578–589
Apachees. *See* Apaches.
Apaches (Apachees), vɪ, 686, 708
  absence of building among, v, 209
  account of, ɪ, 243; v, 202–214
  condition and prospects, v, 695
  country occupied by, v, 197, 203, 207–209; vɪ, 704
  difficulties in governing, v, 213–214
  divisions, ɪv, 216; v, 206, 207–208
  history, v, 204–206
  lack of pottery among, ɪɪɪ, 299
  language, v, 698
Apaches (Apachees)—Continued
  longevity, v, 208
  manners and customs, v, 210–212
  map showing location, ɪɪ, 28; ɪɪɪ, 96
  migration, v, 202, 205
  New Mexico, population, ɪ, 519
  origin legend, v, 687–688; vɪ, 568
  population, ɪ, 243, 245, 518, 519; ɪɪɪ, 528; v, 484; vɪ, 686, 704
  predatory nature, v, 202
  Querehos identified as, ɪv, 35
  raids into Mexico, ɪɪ, 330, 334
  relations with Spaniards, v, 205
  resemblance to Querechos, ɪv, 36
  revolt against Spaniards, v, 212
  See also Apaches Mascaleros; Apaches Tontos; Gila Apaches; Jicarillas; Mescaleros.
Apaches Jicarillas, ruins in range of, v, 208
  See also Jicarillas.
Apaches Mascaleros, origin of name, v, 207
  range of, v, 207
  See also Mescaleros.
Apaches Tontos. *See* Tontos.
Apalacha, application of name, ɪɪɪ, 528
Apalache (town), Narvaez expedition at, ɪɪɪ, 30–31; vɪ, 45
Apalachee (Apalaches, Apalachites, Appalaches), ɪɪɪ, 528–529
  ancient and modern, ɪɪɪ, 528
  included in Appalachian group, v, 42
  missionary work among, vɪ, 734
  Muscogee language spoken by, ɪɪ, 34
  primordial Floridians, v, 99
  See also Apalachians; Apolashe; Asphalashe.
Apalaches. *See* Apalachee.
Apalachia, Apalachian, discussion of name, v, 594, 595
Apalachian group. *See* Apalachians.
Apalachian (Appalachian) languages, preservation of, ɪɪɪ, 96
  publications in, ɪv, 542–546
Apalachian (Appalachian) Mountains, Indians of, v, 42
  tribes transferred from, vɪ, 522

Apalachians (Apalachian group, Appalachians), vi, 37, 552
  account of, ii, 33–35; iii, 34
  attempt to gather statistics on, v, 482
  census, i, 508–517; vi, 690
  character, iii, 37
  characteristics of men, iv, 614
  cranial capacity, ii, 332, 335; vi, 244, 574
  destroyed by Creeks, v, 259
  generic stock, vi, 31
  map showing location of, ii, 28
  migration of, v, 99–100
  name, v, 594–595
    derivation of, iii, 530
  one of seven ethnic groups, ii, 33, 343
  population, i, 523; vi, 276, 518, 522
  relations with Spaniards, iii, 27–28
  statistics on, v, 498
  stature, iv, 349
  superior physique, v, 243–244
  supreme deity of, iii, 511
  territory occupied by, i, 197; v, 42
  tribes composing, i, 197; ii, 34, 344; iii, 29; v, 42; vi, 47
  tribes adopting Christianity, v, 504
  war with Whites, v, 45–46; vi, 185
  See also Apalachee.
Apalachicola (Appalachicola) Bay, mounds near, iii, 77
Apalachicola (Appalachicola) River region, Indians of, vi, 32
Apalachicola (Appalachicola) town, a peace town, iii, 531
  pottery from, i, 84
Apalachicolas (Appalachicolas), vi, 686
  account of, iii, 531
  agreement to removal, vi, 445
  land ceded by, ii, 602; vi, 456
  land purchased from, ii, 600
  name, origin of, iii, 531
  population, iii; 531, 609, 619; vi, 686
  removal, vi, 497
  statistics on lands of, ii, 605
  treaty with, v, 499
Apalachites. *See* Apalachee.
Apalocha, a form of Apalousa (q. v.), iii, 529
Apalousa (Apelousas, Appelousa), brief account of, iii, 529
Apalousa—Continued
  classification, iii, 402
  population, iii, 529, 531
Apanenae, a synonym of Pawnee (q. v.), iii, 529
Apaneo, a Mexican settlement, iii, 529
A-pang-as-se, a Tuolumne band, iv, 407
Apango, a Mexican settlement, iii, 529
Apani, De Soto's name for Pawnee (q. v.), vi, 495
Apanina, De Soto's name for Pawnee (q. v.), v, 495
Apantos, description of, iii, 529
Apaumet, account of life of, vi, 507
Apaxco, a Mexican settlement, iii, 529
Apazingau, a Mexican settlement, iii, 529
Apeche-caw-boway, signature of, ii, 226
Apecun (carrying strap), use of, iii, 515
Apelousas. *See* Apalousa.
Aperas, brief account of, iii, 529–530
Aperrues, briefly described, iii, 530
Apetous, briefly described, iii, 530
Apichiqui, a tribe of Peru, iii, 530
Ap-laches, a Tuolumne band, iv, 407
Apokeepsing, former name of Poughkeepsie, iii, 530
  meaning of name, iii, 530
Apokess, Chief, vi, 255
Apolashe, location, iii, 585
  population, iii, 585
  See also Apalachee.
Apomatox, a branch of James River, Va., iii, 530
Apoquenemy, derivation of name, iii, 530
Apotos, an Amazon tribe, iii, 530
Apoza, an Indian settlement, iii, 530
Appa, an Indian settlement in Mexico, iii, 530
Appalache (River), uncertain etymology of, iii, 530
Appalaches. *See* Apalachee.
Appalachian languages. *See* Apalachian languages.
Appalachian Mountains. *See* Apalachian Mountains.
Appalachians. *See* Apalachians.
Appalachicola Bay. *See* Apalachicola Bay.
Appalachicola River. *See* Apalachicola River.
Appalachicola town. *See* Apalachicola.
Appalachicolas. *See* Apalachicolas.

Appanee, meaning of the name, iii, 531
Appaumut, Hendrick, presence of, at conference, v, 667
Appelousas. *See* Apalousa.
Appolabamba, Indians of, iii, 531
Appropriations, for Indian account, vi, 724–725
  for removal of tribes, vi, 431–435
Apuala, settlement of, iii, 532
Apuckshanubbee, a settlement of Choctaws and Chickasaws, iv, 582
Apuias, description, iii, 532
A qua mish, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census of, v, 488
Aquanishuonig, country subject to Iroquois, iii, 196
Aquascalientes, location, iv, 39
Aquascogoc. *See* Aquoscojos.
Aquas-saw-tee, a Muskogee dialect, i, 268
Aquatzagane, ancient Pennsylvania band, iii, 532
  See also Mahican.
Aquauachuques, a New Jersey band, iii, 532
Aquedaukenash, meaning of name, v, 225
  noted Pennacook fishing place, v, 225
Aquedoctau, origin of name, v, 225
Aquidneck, former name of Rhode Island, iii, 532; vi, 125
Aquiguires, a Brazilian tribe, iii, 532
Aquinoshioni (Aquinushionee), a synonym of Iroquois, iii, 532; vi, 188
  meaning of name, iii, 532; vi, 188
Aquismon, a Mexican settlement, iii, 532
Aquoscojos Indians, colony attacked by, vi, 93
  hostilities with, vi, 92
Arache, identification, iv, 30
Aracuyes, description, iii, 532–533
Aragiske, Iroquois name for Virginia, iii, 533
Aranama. *See* Arrenamuse.
Arapahas. *See* Arapaho.
Arapaho (Arapahas, Arapahoes, Arepahas, Arrapahoes, Arrepahas), v, 495; vi, 686
  bands of, v, 496
  brief account of, i, 244; iii, 533
  called Tattooed People, v, 496
Arapaho—Continued
  census, vi, 556, 713
  country occupied by, i, 259; iii, 403, 533, 596; v, 496; vi, 556, 695, 704
  given as part of the Atsina, i, 259
  Gros Ventres, a band of, vi, 699
  headdress, illustrated, iii, 68
  indigenous to Kansas, vi, 536
  map showing location, iii, 96
  name, meaning of, iii, 533
  population, i, 244, 245, 519, 523; iii, 404, 533, 596, 609; v, 495; vi, 686, 695, 704
  war coat, illustrated, iii, 67
  See also Kaninahoick; Seraticks.
Arapaho (Arapahoe) language, a cognate dialect of the Cheyenne, iii, 404
  characteristics, iii, 404
  vocabulary, iii, 446–459
Arapahoes. *See* Arapaho.
Arasas, territory occupied by, iii, 533
Arauca River, tribes on, iii, 533
Araucanians, account of, iii, 533–535
Arawak. *See* Arrowauk.
Ar bic coo chee, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
Arbre Croche, Ottawa settlement of, described, iii, 535–536
  population of, iii, 535
Arbuckle, Gen., vi, 502
Arc Indians, a name for the Arkansas (q. v.), iii, 537
Archeology, discussion of Squier's work in, iv, 116
  general, i, 44–46
  intrusive, source of features of, v, 99
  progress in, iv, 169–170
  See also Antiquities.
Archer, Bishop, iv, 535
Architecture, ancient, of Mexico and Peru, iv, 437
  of American Indians, iv, 662
  steps in development, i, 342
  Toltec, characteristics of, v, 29, 30
  See also Buildings; Dwellings.
Ardas, a Quito tribe, iii, 536
Areguoy, a Paraguay settlement, iii, 536

Arellano, Don Tristan de, expedition led by, IV, 34, 37
Arenac, derivation of name, III, 536
Arendahronons (Ahrendah-ronons), a Huron tribe, IV, 204
  account of, III, 522
Arentapaqua, a Mexican settlement, III, 536
Arepahas. *See* Arapaho.
Arequipa, origin of name, III, 536
Aresaguntacook Indians, location, V, 227
  meaning of name, V, 227
  relations with Pennacooks, V, 227
  See also Amariscoggins; Anasaguntakook.
Areskoui (Agreskoe), Iroquois god of war, III, 522, 536
Arica, burials at, V, 658
  examination of guacas at, V, 93
  proposed excavations at, V, 658–659
  skulls from cemetery of, II, 329
Aricaree (Arickaras, Arickarees, Arricaras, Aurickarees), VI, 686, 695
  brief description, VI, 696
  census, VI, 556
  divisions, III, 630
  effect of smallpox on, I, 258; VI, 486
  in the Dacota group, II, 37
  language spoken by, III, 630
  location, III, 595, 630; V, 494; VI, 556, 696, 704
  map showing location, III, 96
  population, I, 257, 523; III, 595, 630, 631; V, 494; VI, 686, 695, 696, 704
  reference to territory of, IV, 486
  relations with Mandans, III, 254
  See also Ricarees.
Aricaretes, of Guayama, country occupied by, III, 536
Arickaras. *See* Aricaree; Eokoros.
Arickarees. *See* Aricaree.
Aricoris nation, of Guayama, description, III, 536–537
Arikara. *See* Aricaree; Ricarees.
Ario, a Mexican settlement, III, 537
Arivi, mission of Barcelona Province, IV, 556
Arkansas (State), derivation of name, III, 537; IV, 384
  Indian lands in, III, 585, 586; V, 480
  number of Indians in, III, 585, 586; V, 480, 481
  population and area, IV, 610
Arkansas (Arkanses) Indians, classification, III, 402
  description, III, 537
  population, III, 537
  territory occupied by, III, 559
  villages, III, 537
  warriors, estimate of, III, 557, 559
  See also Quapaws.
Arkansas River, followed by De Soto, VI, 67
  probable origin of the name, IV, 562
Arkansas River region, described, I, 269–270
Arkanses. *See* Arkansas Indians.
Arkokisa. *See* Accocesaws.
Armeomecks, a location on the Susquehannah, III, 537
Armewamux, a location on the Delaware, III, 537
Armiros, a nation of Paraguay, III, 537
Armlets. *See* Bracelets.
Armouchiquois, an Abenaki band, III, 537
Armstrong, George Parker, home of, described, III, 113
  ranch of, mentioned, III, 112, 114
Armstrong, Mr., quoted on the Choctaws, VI, 526
Arnold, Benedict, IV, 121
  extract from will made by, IV, 153
  Fort Stanwix relieved by, VI, 290
Arosaguntacook. *See* Amariscoggins; Anasuguntakook; Aresaguntacook.
Arouaques, supposed ancestors of the Caribs, III, 538
Ar par lar tus tun nuck ee, a Cussetaw Town chief, IV, 579
Arrapahoes. *See* Arapaho.
Arrenamuse, a Texas tribe, III, 538
Arrepahas. *See* Arapaho.
Arrianicosies, location, III, 538
Arrow dance, description, IV, 80
Arrowauks, V, 28

Arrowheads, I, 77–78
  copper, found in burials, I, 128
  illustrations of, I, 81–82; III, 468; IV, 175
  materials used for, I, 78; IV, 159
  method of making, I, 212
  of the Congarees, IV, 159
  of the Iowas, III, 275
  of the Sioux, II, 177
  preparation of flints for, III, 467
  skill shown in making, V, 114
Arrowmaker, occupation of, III, 69, 81
Arrows, antiquity of, I, 77
  blunt, Algonquin name for, I, 77
  force exerted by, I, 77
  of Oregon and California, III, 207
  of the Apaches, V, 209–210
  Shoshonee, described, I, 212–213
  See also Arrowheads; Arrowmaker; Bow and Arrow.
Arrowshaft, method of making, I, 212
Art, Indian, antique, IV, 437–456
  at time of the Discovery, IV, 121–123, 438–440
  decline of, on European contact, IV, 121–122
  destroyed by the Discovery, IV, 142
  during period of De Soto, IV, 123–125
  modern, II, 509–516; IV, 435–437
  northern and southern, compared, V, 394
  northward trend, IV, 123
  state of, IV, 435–456; V, 391–398
    among the Creeks, V, 691–693
  structural, V, 391–393
Arts, Indian, I, 70–94
  ancient epoch, IV, 116–117
  and artisans, IV, 453–456
  and crafts, II, 511–516
  general summary, V, 115–117
  household, uniformity of, IV, 175
  judgment by tools, I, 70–71
  of northern tribes, culmination, V, 115
  of southern tribes, culmination, V, 115
  overrated by conquerors, V, 95
  reasons for decline, V, 116–117
  remains indicating, VI, 598
  state at Discovery, V, 88
    inferred by antiquities, I, 70
Aryes, a Brazilian tribe, III, 538
Ascondido Rio, a name for the Mississippi, III, 538
Aseguang, census, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Ashegen. *See* Osse-gon.
Ashmun, Samuel, Indian wife of, II, 161
Asiatic cholera, appearance of, in Black Hawk War, VI, 453
Asiatics, compared with Indian tribes, I, 35–43
  early medical knowledge, IV, 492–494
Asiganoc, a leader of the Ottawas, III, 538
Askew, murder party led by, IV, 624, 629
Aspberry, D. P., work of, IV, 546
Asphalashe, country occupied by, III, 596
  population, III, 596
  See also Apalachee.
Asquam, origin of name, V, 221
Assama, name for tobacco plant, III, 538
Assaragoa, Indian name for Governor of Virginia, III, 538; VI, 229
Assareawa, application of name, III, 538
Assawa Lake, meaning of name, III, 538
Asseguns (Assigunaigs), account of, I, 305–308
  alliance with Mascoutins, VI, 203
  country occupied by, VI, 202
  expulsion from Lake region, VI, 206
  war with the Manatoulines, VI, 203
Assenjigun, Algonquin name for Osage, IV, 304
Assestagueronons, a name for Maskoutens (q. v.), IV, 206
Assigunaigs. *See* Assegun.
Assinaboes. *See* Assiniboin.
Assinaboin River, description, III, 538–539
Assinaboina, application of name, III, 538
Assinaboines. *See* Assiniboin.
Assinaboins. *See* Assiniboin.
Assinabwoines. *See* Assiniboin.
Assineboes. *See* Assiniboin.
Assineboins. *See* Assiniboin.
Assinepoels (Assinipouals), III, 556
  totem, III, 556
  warriors, number of, III, 556, 559

Assiniboin (Assinaboes, Assinaboines, Assinaboins, Assinabwoines, Assineboes, Assineboins, Assiniboine, Assiniboins, Assinniboins, Assinoboins), VI, 617, 686
  account of, III, 539
  affiliations, V, 99
  bands, III, 630
  called Stone Sioux, VI, 686
  census, VI, 556
  ceremony, VI, 627
  classification, II, 169; III, 402
  country occupied by, III, 559, 594, 630; V, 494; VI, 34, 556, 695, 704
  cranial capacity, II, 335; V, 244
  effect of smallpox, I, 257; VI, 486
  enemies of the Mandans, III, 253
  general condition, VI, 696
  language spoken by, II, 169; III, 630
  linguistic affinities, I, 248
  map showing location, III, 96
  migrations, II, 32
  name, derivation of, I, 81
    etymology of, III, 539; V, 593
  population, I, 257, 523; III, 539, 594, 609, 631; V, 494; VI, 686, 695, 696, 704
  separated from Dacotas, I, 247–248
  separated from Ihanktonwan, I, 249
  shape of skulls, II, 317
  Siouan, with Algonquin name, VI, 34
  warriors, estimate of, III, 556, 559
  Wattasoons killed by, III, 251
  See also Assinepoels.
Assiniboin (Assiniboine) language, numerals of, IV, 429–431, 432
  vocabulary, IV, 416–429
Assiniboine, Assiniboins. *See* Assiniboin.
Assinipouals. *See* Assinepoels.
Assinniboins, Assinoboins. *See* Assiniboin.
Assistaeronons (Assistagueronon, Assistaqueronons), synonyms of Mascoutin (q. v.), IV, 244; VI, 326
Assoggoyawauthau, Indian name of Red Jacket, VI, 326
Assonet, application of the name, III, 539–540
Assonet inscription, VI, 113–114, 605
  illustration of, VI, 113
  See also Dighton Rock inscription.
Assonets, I, 117
Assoyawatha, VI, 647
  See also Red Jacket.
Assuncion, settlement of, III, 540
Asthma, treatment for, IV, 512
Astor, John Jacob, fur company organized by, I, 141; VI, 398
  mention of agents of, II, 29
  reference to fortune of, II, 186
Astorenga, a Mohawk geographical name, III, 540
Astronomical Commission, mounds opened by, V, 93
Astronomy, Aztec knowledge of, IV, 665
  Indian knowledge of, III, 275–276; IV, 239, 240
  See also Moon; Stars; Sun.
Atacama, hunting customs, III, 540
Atacama period, mounds ascribed to, V, 93
Atacheo, settlement of, III, 540
Ataco, settlement of, III, 540
Atahentsic, I, 18
  Iroquois deity, III, 540
  Iroquois descent from, V, 147
  story of, V, 155; VI, 670
Atahualpa, reference to execution of, III, 23–24
  reference to plunder of, VI, 59
  warriors punished by, III, 59
Atakapas. *See* Attacapas.
Atalantis, V, 28
Atapalo, a Mexican settlement, III, 541
Ataronch-ronons, a Wyandot or Huron subtribe, III, 541
Atasis, a Georgia band, III, 541
Atatarho. *See* Atotarho.
Atawas (Atawawas, Atowas, Atowawas, Attawas), V, 146
  allies of Hurons, V, 143
  classification, II, 36
  included in Algonquin group, II, 36
  location, III, 541; VI, 202
  names for the Ottawas, I, 306; V, 41; VI, 202
  See also Ottawas.
Atawa's band, Saganaws, a Chippewa band, I, 458
  census, I, 458–467
Atawawas. *See* Atawas.
Atchipia, Miami name for the soul, III, 541
Atemaxique, a Mexican ban.d, III, 541

Atempa, a Mexican band, III, 541

Atfalati. *See* Sualatine.

Athabasca group, origin tradition, I, 61

  See also Athapascan family.

Athapaccas, Athapasca. *See* Athapascan family.

Athapascan family (Athapaccas, Athapasca, Athapascans), VI, 615
  - characteristics, V, 174, 176
  - eastern limit, II, 27
  - general account of, V, 172–179
  - hair, II, 322
  - linguistic family, III, 401
  - map showing location, II, 28
  - name, application of, III, 541; V, 172
  - origin tradition, I, 19
  - population, II, 27, 28; V, 172
  - relations with other tribes, V, 176
  - route of migration, II, 27
  - tribes composing, list of, II, 27–28; III, 542
  - *See also* Athabasca group.

Athapascans. *See* Athapascan family.

Athens, Pa., Indian council place, V, 670

Atillan, a Mexican settlement, III, 542

Atira, Paraguay Indians, III, 542

Ati-rhagenrets, name for Neutral Nation (q. v.), IV, 204, 208

Atitlagua, settlement of Othomie Indians, III, 542

Atiwendaronk, name for Neutral Nation (q. v.), IV, 204

Atkinson, Gen., III, 281; VI, 505
  - Black Hawk pursued by, VI, 454

Atl, a name in the Mexican calendar, III, 542

Atlaco, a Mexican settlement, III, 542

Atlamajacinco, a Mexican settlement, III, 542

Atlamazuque, a Mexican settlement, III, 543

Atlantic Coast tribes, colonies planted among, VI, 95–112
  - stocks represented by, VI, 31–32

Atlatlauca, Mexican settlements called, III, 543

Atliacan, a Mexican settlement, III, 543

Atlistac, a Mexican settlement, III, 543

Atnah(s) or Chin nation, V, 173
  - classification, III, 402
  - location, III, 543

Atolua, a Mexican settlement, III, 543

Atotarho (Atatarho), I, 13, 18; VI, 743
  - account of, V, 163
  - illustration representing, I, 421, 429; VI, 188
  - king of the Five Nations, V, 638, 639, 642, 643
  - name, use of, III, 62; V, 163
  - ruler of the Iroquois Confederacy, III, 543
  - story concerning, III, 543

Atotarhoes, leaders of the Six Nations, I, 125

Atotonilcao, a Mexican settlement, III, 543

Atowas, Atowawas. *See* Atawas.

Atoyaque, a Mexican settlement, III, 543

Atoyaquillo, a Mexican settlement, III, 543

Atrakwer, a synonym of Andastes (q. v.), VI, 137, 139

Atrisco, Indians of, III, 543

Atsina, I, 437
  - *See also* Ahnenin; Gros Ventres of the Prairie.

Atsina-Algo Indians, I, 198

Attacapas (Attuckapas), VI, 35
  - cannibalism among, III, 544
  - head flattening among, II, 325
  - language, III, 544
  - linguistic family, III, 402
  - name, meaning of, III, 544
  - population, III, 544

Attakullakilla, VI, 199

Attakullakulla, chief of the Cherokees, VI, 239

Attapulgas, Seminole town, III, 544

Attassee, battle at, VI, 367, 370, 379

Attatea, aid rendered to colonists, VI, 280

Attawas. *See* Atawas.

Attenonderonk, a name for the Eries (q. v.), IV, 201

Attignaouentan. *See* Attigñawantan.

Attigñawantan (Attignaouentan), a Huron tribe, III, 544; IV, 204
  - also called Bear nation, III, 544.

Attigneenongnahac. *See* Attigneenonguahac.

Attigneenonguahac (Attiquenongnahai), a Huron tribe, IV, 204
  Wyandot subtribe, III, 544
Attikamigues, a former Algonquin band, III, 544
Attinoindarons. *See* Attionandarons.
Attionandarons (Attinoindarons), a synonym of Neutral Nation, III, 289; IV, 204
  aided by the Andastes, III, 290
  Iroquois name for the Eries, III, 290
  See also Neutral Nation.
Attiquenongnahai. *See* Attigneenonguahac.
Attistaeronons, a name for the Mascoutins, IV, 244
Attiwandaronk, attacked by Senecas, IV, 208
  Huron name for Neutral Nation (q. v.), IV, 204, 207
Attowa Lake, Algonquin name for Lake Huron, IV, 383
Attowatomig, Chief, VI, 255
Attuckapas. *See* Attacapas.
Atuncanar, ruins of, III, 544
Atwater, C., IV, 140
  antiquities described by, IV, 132; VI, 601
  quoted on mounds, IV, 145
  theory of, IV, 132
Atzalan, a Mexican settlement, III, 544
Atzola, a Mexican settlement, III, 544
Auanda, settlement of, III, 545
Aubert, Thomas, VI, 48
Aubrey, M., battle led by, VI, 226
Aucassisco. *See* Aucocisco.
Auchenauhatchee, derivation of name, IV, 381
Auchiapa, a Mexican settlement, III, 545
Aucocisco (Aucasisco), location, III, 545
  mentioned by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Audubon, the naturalist, emigrants with, II, 114
Augaras, a Brazilian tribe, III, 545
Augaris, a Brazilian nation, III, 545
Augawoam, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
  See also Agawam.
Aughquagas, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  population, VI, 714
  See also Oquagos.
Aughquago, Iroquois village, location, III, 545
Augusta, Ga., settlement of, III, 545
Auhoba, a Creek town, V, 262
Auke Indians, census, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Aullagas, a Peruvian band, III, 545
Aumughcawgen, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Aunette chapco, meaning of name, IV, 380
Auniers, III, 555
  totems, III, 555
  warriors, number of, III, 555
  See also Mohawk.
Aupjen, a Mohegan chief, III, 546
Au Post, early name of Vincennes, VI, 185
Aupowa, Chippewa name for sacred dream, III, 545
Aupumut, Hendric, Housatonics represented by, VI, 326
Aurickarees. *See* Aricaree.
Auroghtaregh, signer of treaty, VI, 144
Aurora Borealis, prayers to, IV, 71
  goddess of war, IV, 495
  Winnebago belief concerning, IV, 240
  Winnebago name for, IV, 240
Ausonian range, tribes transferred from, VI 522
Ausonian tribes, condition of, VI, 525
  tribes composing, VI, 519
Au tau ga, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Aute, Narvaez at, III, 31; VI, 46
Autianqua, winter camp of De Soto, IV, 133
Autis, a Peruvian nation, III, 546
Autlan, population of, III, 546
Autobas, a Creek town, V, 262
Auvamba, a Mexican settlement, III, 546
Avando, atrocities committed by, II, 310–311
Avery, Judge, V, 670
Avoyelles, a former Louisiana tribe, III, 546

Awani. *See* Yosemety.
Awegan, village of, III, 546
Awls, bone, illustrated, I, 88
  bone, use of, I, 87–88
  copper, illustrated, V, 93
Axacala, a Mexican settlement, III, 546
Axacuba, a Mexican settlement, III, 546
Axayacazi, the Aztec ruler, III, 546
Axes, copper, illustration of, V, 93
  illustrations of, IV, 167
  Peruvian, stone and copper, V, 92
  stone, illustrations of, I, 79, 80, 285; II, 91
    Indian name for, I, 76
    manner of using, I, 76
    use of name, I, 75–76
Axixique, a Mexican settlement, III, 546
Axuchitlan, a Mexican settlement, III, 546
Ayabai Bizhiki, a noted Pillager, V, 189
Ayacores, country inhabited by, III, 546
Ayahuacas, an extinct nation of Peru, III, 547
Ayanemo, chief of the Nyantics, III, 547
Ayauiris, brief account of, III, 547
Ayenis (Aynics), a Florida tribe, III, 547
  brief account of, I, 239–240
  See also Hainai.
Ayennes, possibly the Iowas, III, 256
Aymaras, head flattening among, II, 324, 327
  language, II, 327
  resemblance to Quichuas, II, 327
Aynics. *See* Ayenis.
Ayotl. *See* Oiyotl.
Ayouais (Ayouas), synonyms of Iowas (q. v.), III, 256, 547
Ayres, Col., III, 295
Ayutans, a synonym of Ietans (q. v.), III, 547
Azacango, a Mexican settlement, III, 547
Azapa Valley, description of fruits of, V, 657
Azaqualoia, a Mexican settlement, III, 547
Azequias, brief description of, III, 547
Azhabi, story of, III, 547
Azian, III, 65
  described, III, 68
  illustrated, III, 68
Azocalco, a Mexican settlement, III, 547
Aztacalco, a Mexican settlement, III, 548
Aztahuacan, a Mexican settlement, III, 548
Aztalan, evidence concerning location, V, 101
  fortification called, III, 278
  left by Aztecs, VI, 742
Aztec dwarf, measurements of hair, III, 384
Aztec dynasty, chronology, V, 97
Aztecs, arts of, hereditary, VI, 449
    industrial, VI, 455–456
  calendar system, IV, 665
  chronology, I, 20
  civilization, I, 48, 71; V, 88–89, 102–103; VI, 591, 592, 594
  compared with northern tribes, VI, 595–596
  customs, reference to, V, 394
  history, discussion of, III, 548–549
  human sacrifice among, V, 77; VI, 586, 594
  labor of women, IV, 444
  migrations, I, 63–64; V, 96, 101–102
  mounds, reference to, I, 62
  mythology, VI, 636–646
  not aborigines, I, 21
  origin, proof of, I, 22
    tradition, I, 19–20
  picture writing, IV, 663–664
  protective doublet, III, 69
  religion, V, 62; VI, 585, 595
  sepulchral vase, VI, 576, 589
  social divisions, V, 102
  spinning methods, IV, 441–442
  sun worship, IV, 639
  Toltecs overthrown by, V, 61
  See also Mexican tribes.
Aztlan, Aztec landing from, illustrated, I, 20
  location, I, 64
Azuchitlan, a Mexican settlement, III, 549

B

Babesacundabee (Babesakundiba, Ba-be-se-gun-dib-a, Babesikundabay, Babisikundabi), I, 338; II, 158, 159
  brief account of, IV, 554
  chief at Sandy Lake, VI, 386
  Chippewa chief, I, 338
  grave-post of, IV, 554
  saved by Sioux chief, VI, 388

Baborigame, an Indian mission in Mexico, IV, 554
Baby, Chief, II, 260
Babylon, bowl from ruins of, IV, 492–494
Babylonic dispersion, era of, II, 46
Bacallaos, islands of, IV, 554
Bachouanan, a Nopeming Indian village, IV, 554
Bachtamo, an Indian god, IV, 554
Backus, Dr., V, 517
Backus, Lt. Col., information supplied by, V, 204
Backus, Maj. E., Navajoes described by, III, 70; IV, 209
  sketch transmitted by, III, 70
Bacon, Lord, cited, VI, 614
Bacowa, a California tribe, VI, 711
Bad Hail, Seven Fires discussed by, II, 169
Badaxe, Indian defeat at battle of, V, 46
Bahama Islands, brief account of, IV, 554
Bailadores, a Maracaibo tribe, IV, 555
Bainswa. *See* Bianswa.
Ba-kow-a, a California band, III, 116
Balbuena, a mission settlement, IV, 555
Bald Hill Indians, brief account of, III, 139
  encounter with, III, 134
  other names for, III, 139
Baldrics, made of bone, I, 104
Balista, a weapon of New England tribes, I, 284
  described, I, 85
  illustrated, I, 285
  represented on Dighton Rock, I, 284
Ball bats, illustrations of, II, 516
Ball game, Dacotah, described, IV, 64
  description of, II, 78
  of the Creeks, V, 277
  on ice, illustrated, II, 75
  on prairie, illustrated, II, 75
Baloballa language, tribes speaking, V, 487–488
Balsover, Mr., information obtained by, III, 88
Baltasar, an Aztec settlement, IV, 555
Baltimore, a missionary center, VI, 735
Baltimore, Lord, emigration under, VI, 178
Balza, illustration of, V, 95
Bamondu, myth concerning, IV, 555
Bannock. *See* Bonacks; Ponashita.
Bannos, account of ruins at, IV, 556
Banocks. *See* Bonacks.
Banomas, a Quito tribe, IV, 556
Baptism of Indians, by Moravians, V, 680
Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, work among Indians, V, 502, 503
Baptist Home Missionary Society, work among Indians, V, 502, 503
Baptiste's Band, census, I, 498–507
Baradero, an Indian settlement, IV, 556
Baraga, Rev. Frederick, missionary work, IV, 537, 538; V, 503, 699
Barbadoes, pottery of, V, 28
Barbarism, theory concerning, II, 44
Barbour, Commissioner, population estimated by, VI, 705
Barbour, Secretary of War, treaty negotiated by, VI, 418–419
Barbudos, a barbarous Indian nation, IV, 556
Barbures, Indian nation of New Granada, IV, 556
Barcelona Province, boundaries, IV, 556
  missions, IV, 556
Barclay, Commodore, VI, 363
Barcluxor, Indian ceremony at, VI, 130
Bareces Indians, location, IV, 556
Bark, cloth woven of, I, 90
  huts of, illustrated, II, 192
  tooth-work pictures on, VI, 631
  use, for huts, II, 191–192
    for inscriptions, I, 338; VI, 387, 389–390
    in canoe making, II, 512–513
Barkalow, D., excavations on land of, V, 666
Barker, Rev. Francis, work of, IV, 538
Barker, Capt. Thomas, death of, IV, 158
Barlow, Arthur, voyage of, VI, 83
Barnard, David, of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Barnard, Rev. A., III, 376
Barnard, Timpooche, chief at Euchee, IV, 580
Barnard, William, chief at Euchee, IV, 580
Barnwell, Col., III, 294
Barrenness among Indians, III, 211
Barrens, description of territory known as, III, 345

Bart, Lavoine, brief account of, IV, 557
Barter. *See* Trade.
Bartholomew, Don, adelantado of Hayti, II, 309
Bartlett, John R., petition signed by, III, 618
Barton, Benjamin Smith, reference to work of, II, 357
Bartram, cited on earthworks, V, 110
  cited on Indian monuments, V, 115
Basalt, occurrence of, I, 208
Bashaba, office of, IV, 557; V, 218, 228; VI, 96, 151
Basinger, Lt., death of, VI, 470
Basket press, description, IV, 444–446
  illustration of, IV, 456
Baskets (basketry), California Indian, making, illustrated, V, 80
  California Indian, use, illustrated, V, 216–217
  of Bonacks, V, 216–217
  of Clear Lake bands, III, 107
  of Columbia River tribes, III, 206
  of Creeks, V, 692
  of Klamath River Indians, III, 142
  press made of, IV, 444–447, 456
  Shoshonean, details of making, I, 211
  use in cooking, I, 61, 211; III, 107, 206
Batata, as evidence of migration, V, 104
Batem-da-kai-ee, a California tribe, IV, 557
  location, IV, 557
  vocabulary, III, 421, 434–440
Baths, remedial use, IV, 516
Batnaiuh, an evil spirit, IV, 557
Batocudys of Brazil, color of, II, 320
Battle-axe, brief description of, II, 89
  illustration of, II, 90
  See also Tomahawk.
Bauka. *See* Bogas.
Bauras tribe, brief account of, IV, 557
Bawateeg, Chippewa name for Sault Ste. Marie, IV, 557
Bax, Rev. Father, labors and death of, IV, 594, 595
Bayagoulas, a Louisiana tribe, IV, 558
Baylies, Dr., I, 107
Bayogoulas. *See* Bayagoulas.
Bay tree, use by Indians, III, 114
Beads, colored enamel, I, 104
  illustrations of, I, 104, 105; VI, 603
  See also Wampum.
Beale, Superintendent, population estimated by, VI, 705
Bean, Robert, mention of, IV, 317
Bear, attitude toward, V, 420
  black, range of, I, 433
  grizzly, encounter with, II, 55
Bear claws, necklace of, illustrated, III, 68
  symbolism of, III, 69
Bear nation. *See* Attignawantan.
Bear River Valley, advantages, I, 220
  description, I, 220–223
  importance, I, 202–203
Beard, as a racial characteristic, IV, 362–363
  plucking, II, 322–323; III, 376, 377; V, 182, 211
Bearded Indians. *See* Blanche Indians.
Bear's Tail, a Comanche chief, II, 128
Beauchemin, Antoine, member of expedition, III, 353
Beauchemin, Francis, member of expedition, III, 353
Beaufort, S. C., settlement on site of, VI, 73
Beaujeau, Indian force commended by, VI, 218
Beauregard, Lt., pyramid measured by, VI, 582
Beauty, Indian attitude toward, V, 272
Beaver Creek, tribe dwelling on, VI, 714
Beaver Indians, an Athapascan tribe, III, 526, 542
  location, IV, 558
  population, II, 28; IV, 558
  See also Amikwa.
Beaver Island Indians, a Chippewa band, IV, 558
  brief account of, IV, 558
Beaver Islands, census of Indians of, I, 458–467
  derivation of name, IV, 558
  Indian name for, III, 526
  population, III, 526
Beaver River, erection of fort on, VI, 301, 302
Beaver skin, the standard of value, I, 84

Beavers, disappearance, i, 217, 220
  hunting of, iv, 61
  pestilence among, v, 188
  strength of dams built by, iv, 109
  tail as food, iv, 57
  trapping, v, 177
Beavers, Jacob, a Coweta Town chief, iv, 579
Becauas, territory occupied by, iv, 558
Beckwith, Lt., mention of, ii, 114
Bedah-marek, at Clear Lake council, iii, 109
  language, iii, 110
  meaning of name, iii, 110
Bedford, Indian village at, v, 224
Bedies, vi, 686
  location, iv, 558
  population, iv, 558; vi, 686
Bedud (Be-dud), ii, 153
  brief biography, ii, 163
  Chippewa chief, iv, 558
Beers, Commander, death of, vi, 159
Beggar's dance, illustration of, iii, 62
  object of, iii, 62
Behechio, cacique of Xaragua, ii, 309
Beheran, god of the Euphrates Valley, iv, 559
Behistun, rock of, conquests depicted on, i, 428–429
Behring Straits, brief description of, iv, 559
Belantse-Eteas (Belautse-etea), brief account of, iv, 559
  population, iii, 609; iv, 559
  See also Hidatsa.
Belautse-etea. *See* Belantse-Eteas.
Belcourt, Rev. G. A., work of, iv, 535, 536
Belcourt, Rev. Mr., buffalo hunt described by, iv, 101
Beliefs, vi, 406
  concerning ancestors, i, 39
  concerning birds, i, 33
  concerning diseases, i, 250
  concerning eclipses, i, 271
  concerning good and evil, i, 31–32, 35
  concerning land ownership, ii, 194
  concerning phenomena of nature, v, 245, 420
  concerning sickness, ii, 175, 180
  concerning the moon, i, 271, 272
Beliefs—Continued
  concerning the soul, i, 33, 39, 83, 87; iii, 60, 229, 232; iv, 70, 225, 265; v, 79; vi, 637–638, 658, 664
  fixity of, i, 412
  in duality of gods, i, 17
  indicating oriental origin, i, 413; v, 86–87
  of a Chaldee-Persic character, i, 32
  of Chickasaws, i, 310
  of Comanches, ii, 126–127, 128, 129
  of Dacotas, ii, 197–198
  of Kenistenos, v, 172
  of Muscogees, i, 269, 271, 272
  of Ojibwas, ii, 135–136; iii, 520
  of the Sioux, ii, 175, 177, 178
  regarding a supreme ruler, vi, 572
  revealed in pictographs, i, 413
  See also Dreams; Legends; Mythology; Religion; Soul; Superstition; *and also* under names of tribes.
Bell, Ensign, vi, 239
Bell, Senator, of Tennessee, former Secretary of War, v, 460
  Indian legislation discussed by, v, 460–462, 470, 471–472
Bellabella. *See* Baloballa; Millbank Sound Indians.
Bellacoola. *See* Bella hoo la.
Bella hoo la, census of, v, 488
Bellingham Bay, tribe on, vi, 703
Bellows' Falls, Indians at, v, 226
  inscription at, vi, 607
Beloxi. *See* Biloxi.
Belt, unusual, of copper tubes, i, 128
Belt-keeper, Chief, vi, 214
Belton, Capt., mention of report of, vi, 473
Beltrami, unreliability of, i, 143
Bengalees, as soldiers, ii, 331
Bennett, Richard, signer of Indian treaty, vi, 144
Bent, Gov. Charles, i, 259
  death of, i, 242
  first provincial governor of Texas, v, 483
  Indians described by, i, 242
  paper by, on New Mexico tribes, i, 242–246
Benton, Col., remarks of, on origin of Seminole War, vi, 473
Benton, T. H., iii, 588, 599

Berkely, Bishop, IV, 511
Bernard, Louis, sole survivor of Indian bands, V, 676
Berti, fur-trader, story of, V, 186
Berzelius, metal plate analyzed by, III, 88
Besançon, number of warriors at, III, 553
Besheke (Beshike), Chief, brief account of, IV, 559
  chief at La Pointe, II, 145, 150
  story told by, II, 149
  war chief of Pillagers, V, 189
Beshike. *See* Besheke.
Betois, settlement of, IV, 559
Betting on games, II, 74–78; IV, 64
Betula papyracea, use of bark, II, 512–513
Betumke, population, III, 634
Beverly, ossuaries at, I, 103
Bianswa (Bainswa, Bi-ans-wah, Byainswa), V, 148, 184
  Chippewa chief, V, 98
  dynasty founded by, II, 160
  peace made by, II, 157
  stories concerning, II, 49, 142; IV, 564
  war party led by, II, 146
Bi-ans-wah. *See* Bianswa.
Bible, extracts from, in Chippewa language, V, 604–607
  Indian beliefs concerning, VI, 87, 105
  smoking, no mention of, in, I, 73
  story from, in Cherokee alphabet, II, 228
  translated into Massachusetts language, I, 287
  translated into Natic language, IV, 529–530
Bibliography, of works in Indian languages, IV, 523–553
  of works relating to missions, VI, 733
Bidai. *See* Bedies.
Bidamarek. *See* Bedah-marek.
Bienville, II, 29
Bigamy among the Iowas, VI, 549
Big Bellies, application of name, III, 251
  identified as Minnetarees, III, 251
Big Bend and Verdigris mission, statistics on, IV, 588
Big Bone Lick, Ky., Indian belief concerning, IV, 559
Big Cloud, a Chippewa chief, IV, 559; V, 189
Big Curly-Head, II, 159
  brief biography of, II, 161–162
Big Devils, nickname for the Yanktons, IV, 559
Big-horn, or mountain sheep, habitat of, III, 168–169
Big Kettle, Chief, brief account of, IV, 559
Bigotes, Chief, Coronado accompanied by, IV, 40
  Coronado visited by, IV, 25–26
  imprisoned by Alvarado, IV, 560
Big Tallassie, a Creek town, V, 262
Big-water, Chief, hair of, measured, III, 382
  scalp of, illustration showing, III, 390
Billoxie. *See* Biloxi.
Biloxi (Beloxi, Billoxie, Bolixes, Bolixies), brief account of, IV, 561
  country occupied by, III, 585, 596
  population, III, 585, 596; V, 702
Binghamton, N. Y., Indian village on site of, VI, 132
Biographies, brief, of noted Ojibwas, II, 160–167
Birch bark. *See* Bark.
Birch Bay Indians, population, V, 75
Birds, beliefs concerning, I, 33
  California, briefly described, III, 103, 104, 112, 120
  imitation of songs of, IV, 73–74
Bird Town, census, I, 508–517
Birth. *See* Childbirth.
Birthrate, causes affecting, VI, 563
  See also Population; Reproduction.
Birne, a Utah chief, V, 199
Bishekise, descendant of Black Hawk, III, 376
Bison. *See* Buffalo.
Bizhikins, a noted Pillager, V, 189
Black Cloud, Pillager warrior, II, 165
Black Dog's band, a Medawakanton band, III, 613
  census, I, 498–504, 507
  movements, VI, 540–541
  robbed of horses, IV, 593

Black drink, III, 79; v, 255
  beliefs concerning, v, 266
  botanical remedy of the Appalachians, VI, 632
  ceremony described, v, 266–267
  customs connected with, v, 265
  method of preparing, v, 266
Black Duck, war expedition of, v, 186
Black Eagle, Chief, pipe found by, I, 74
Blackfeet, I, 198, 219; IV, 465, 551; v, 179–184; VI, 686
  census, VI, 556
  characteristics, general, v, 180–181
  classified as Algonquin, I, 197; II, 36, 343; v, 179–180
  classified as Siouan, III, 402, 629
  condition, general, VI, 696
  country occupied by, I, 436; III, 595, 629; IV, 560; v, 494; VI, 556, 695, 698, 704
  customs, v, 686–687
  division of the Sitkeas, III, 252
  divisions, I, 437; III, 629; v, 686; VI, 698
  enemies of, v, 181
  history, v, 685–686
  language spoken by, I, 437; III, 595; VI, 699
  leading men, III, 629
  linguistic affinities, v, 179–180
  map showing location, III, 96
  migration, VI, 33
  origin of name, v, 180, 686
  physical characteristics, v, 181–182, 656
  population, I, 257, 523; III, 595, 609; IV, 560; v, 180, 494; VI, 686, 695, 696, 698, 704
  reference to wars, I, 206
  shape of skulls, II, 317
  smallpox among, I, 257; VI, 486
  See also Blackfoot nation.
Blackfeet language, v, 179–180
  Algonquin, words in, IV, 560
  vocabulary, II, 494–505
Blackfeet Sioux, population, v, 494
  position, v, 494
Blackfoot nation, population, III, 631
  tribes composing, III, 631; v, 179, 180
  See also Blackfeet.
Black Hawk, Chief, III, 280, 382; VI, 647
  death and burial, VI, 454
  hostilities begun by, I, 144
  Indian name, VI, 447, 448
  portrait, VI, 447
  surrender, VI, 454
  tribes associated with, VI, 452
  views held by, VI, 447, 448–449
  war, instigated by, v, 46; VI, 450
    led by, IV, 560
  See also Black Hawk War.
Black Hawk War, account of, VI, 447–454
  estimated cost of, v, 500
  results, IV, 189
Black Hawk's Band, census, I, 498–507
Black Hoof (Blackhoof), Chief, I, 19, 301
  treaty signed by, VI, 344
Black Rivers, IV, 461
  See also Swan Creek and Black Rivers Chippewas.
Blacksnake, Chief, III, 291
  brief account of, IV, 560
  interview with, IV, 345
Blacksnake, Governor, brief account of, v, 673
Black Warrior, Scottish trader known as, VI, 345
  surrender, VI, 374
Blanche Indians, location, IV, 560
  See also Blancs Barbus.
Blanchet, Rev. A., v, 699
Blancs Barbus, estimate of warriors, III, 556, 559
  See also Blanche Indians.
Blankets, cotton, characteristic of Toltecs, II, 26
  cotton, found in New Mexico, II, 28
  Navajo, making of, IV, 436–437
    quality of, IV, 217
    trade in, IV, 212
  of Mexican Indians, IV, 452
  of the Hah-wal-coes, II, 116
  of the Moquis, IV, 72
  of the Winnebago, IV, 58
  Pueblo Indian, illustrated, IV, 436
Bleeding and cupping, practice of, I, 253, 274; II, 180; IV, 242
Block printing, in the Pacific islands, I, 90–91
Block prints, illustration of, I, 86, 90; VI, 312, 603
  use of, I, 90–91

- Blood Indians (Bloods), I, 198; VI, 686
  - bands of, III, 631
  - Blackfeet division, I, 437; IV, 560; V, 179, 686; VI, 686
  - classification, III, 402
  - country occupied by, VI, 699
  - division of the Sitkeas, given as, III, 252
  - identification, VI, 686
  - language, III, 631; VI, 699
  - migrations, VI, 33
  - population, I, 523; VI, 686, 698
  - smallpox among, VI, 486
- Blood letting. *See* Bleeding and cupping.
- Blount, Gov., IV, 630
- Blow-pipe, ancient use of, IV, 447, 448, 449
- Blue Jacket, treaty signed by, VI, 344
- Blumenbach, Prof., II, 319
  - races classified by, IV, 355
- Boalkea. *See* Möal-kai.
- Board of Missions of Presbyterian Church of United States, work among the Indians, V, 502
  - *See also* Presbyterian Church.
- Boatch-wequaid, meaning of name, IV, 560
- Boats, skin, reference to, V, 253
  - *See also* Balza; Canoes.
- Boch-heaf, language spoken by, III, 112
- Bochica, V, 102
- Bodiguas, IV, 561
- Body-painting, for war, rules of, IV, 649
  - of dancers, IV, 79
  - of the Blackfeet, V, 182
  - of the Cuchans, II, 113, 114
  - *See also* Painting.
- Bogas, location, VI, 710
  - population, VI, 710
- Boggs, Gov., attempted assassination, V, 201
- Boisbrules, a nickname for half-breeds, IV, 560
- Bois Forte bands (Chippewas), population, VI, 692
- Bökewa, a mythological magician, IV, 561
- Boles, Alva, III, 167
- Bolixes. *See* Biloxi.
- Bolixi (town), settlement at, V, 108; VI, 185
- Bolixies. *See* Biloxi.
- Bonacks (Banocks, Bonacs, Bonaks, Bonnacks, Bonnarks), IV, 596; VI, 686
  - band of, under chief Te-ve-re-wena, V, 201
    - size of, V, 201
  - bands of, among the "Diggers," V, 199
  - called Root-Diggers, IV, 221; VI, 34
  - classification, III, 402; IV, 551; V, 197, 217
  - condition, IV, 561
  - country inhabited by, I, 198; V, 201, 493; VI, 34, 35
  - decrease in number, 228
  - description, IV, 221–226
  - division of the Snake Indians, I, 206
  - division of the Shoshonee, I, 197, 198
  - food, IV, 221; V, 216
  - horses possessed by, I, 207
  - identified as Shoshonean, II, 38
  - language of, III, 403
  - maps showing location, III, 96, 200
  - population, I, 522; V, 493; VI, 686, 697
  - *See also* Ponashita; Root-Diggers.
- Bonacs. *See* Bonacks.
- Bonaks. *See* Bonacks.
- Bonaparte, Napoleon, measurements of hair, III, 383
- Bondas, a Santa Martha tribe, IV, 561
- Bondwel, Rev. F. G., catechism transmitted by, IV, 538
- Bone implements, awls, I, 87–88
  - fish spear, I, 213
  - shuttle, I, 88
- Bone Indians, a name for the Assegun, VI, 202
  - name of the Osage, IV, 304
  - synonym of Assigunaigs, I, 307
- Bone-men, Toltec myth of, IV, 561
- Bone-pickers, duties, I, 102; IV, 561
- Bones, animal, deposit of, I, 173–175
  - disposal at feasts, V, 171
  - fossil, belief concerning, IV, 645
  - human, disposal, VI, 622
    - preservation, IV, 156
    - respect for, IV, 490
  - pounded and eaten, I, 217
  - *See also* Ossuaries; Bone-pickers.
- Bonework. *See* Bone implements.

Bonnacks. *See* Bonacks.
Bonnarks. *See* Bonacks.
Bonneville, B. L. E., quoted on the word "Oregon," v, 708–709
Boon, Capt. Hawkins, death in action, vi, 307
Boquet, Col. *See* Bouquet, Col. Henry.
Borilos, a Peruvian tribe, iv, 562
Boronota, an Indian settlement of New Granada, iv, 562
Borroas of Chili, color, ii, 320
Boscawen, Admiral, Louisburg invested by, vi, 234
Bosh-ke-dosh, a mythological animal, iv, 562
Boston, Indian name for site of, iv, 562
Botturini, reference to map by, i, 20
Boucfuca. *See* Boukfuka.
Bouck, Wm. C., petition signed by, iii, 618
Boudinot, Elias, murder of, vi, 500, 501, 513
  reference to work of, ii, 357; v, 82
  translations by, iv, 543
Boukfuka, a Louisiana tribe or band, iv, 562
Boundaries between tribes, adjustment, vi, 455–456
Bouquet (Boquet), Col. Henry, vi, 252
  battles with Indians, iv, 614–615; vi, 250
  campaign, vi, 260–262
  delivery of prisoners to, vi, 299
  in expedition against Fort Du-Quesne, vi, 226
  Indian population estimated by, vi, 272; v, 479
  Indian warriors estimated by, iii, 559; vi, 321
  reference to expedition of, vi, 268, 269
    narrative of, iii, 282
Bourne, Richard, missionary work, vi, 734, 735, 736
Boutwell, W. F., i, 145
  attempt to establish mission, v, 188
Bow and arrow, Oregon, illustrated, iii, 468
  Shoshonee, illustrated, i, 211
  use in buffalo hunt, iv, 95
  See also Arrows; Bows.
Bow Indians, a name for the Arkansas (q. v.), iii, 537
Bowen, Eman., map made by, v, 253
Bowles, Mr., fraud perpetrated by, v, 275–276
Bowls, Babylonian sorcerer's, v, 75
  described and illustrated, iv, 492–494
Bowman, Capt., military operations led by, vi, 302
Bowman, Col., Shawnees routed by, vi, 307
Bows, details of making, i, 212
  materials used in, iii, 468
  See also Bow and arrow.
Bow-wood Indians, a part of the Kanzas, iv, 562
  brief account of, iv, 562
Boyaca, a New Granada settlement, iv, 562
Boyd, Lt., torture of, vi, 311
Boys. *See* Children.
Braba, identified as Taos, iv, 32, 39
  map showing location, iv, 39
  village described, iv, 39
  See also Taos.
Bracelets, copper, described, i, 93
  illustrated, i, 92
Braddock, Gen., ii, 306
  campaign against the Indians, vi, 215–218
  defeat of, iv, 614, 619; vi, 249
  expedition of, v, 44, 52
Bradford, John M., legend communicated by, iii, 322
Bradstreet, Col., vi, 243, 260
  campaign of, vi, 259–260, 262
  Fort Frontenac taken by, vi, 226
  Indian population estimated by, vi, 272
  military expedition of, vi, 252, 253–255
Brady, Gen., vi, 506
Brahma, creation symbolized by, v, 58
Brahmanism, v, 57–58
Brain, Indian, ii, 328–331
  comparative size, ii, 330, 333, 334
  effect of head flattening, ii, 328
  intellectual lobe of, discussed, ii, 333–334
  size affected by activity, ii, 331

Brainerd, David, at Shamokin, iv, 617
  attempted intimidation of, v, 76–77
  missionary work, v, 503; vi, 321, 734, 736
  power opposed to, vi, 647
  quoted on Indian languages, ii, 425
Brant, John, efforts to clear his father's name, v, 672
Brant, Joseph, iii, 514; vi, 248, 647, 734
  account of, iv, 562; vi, 281, 284
  activities during Revolutionary War, vi, 297
  at Wyoming, discussion of, v, 672–673
  battle led by, vi, 309
  cited on location of tribes, v, 668
  enterprises, vi, 298
  Gospel translated by, iv, 526
  Indian name of, v, 668
  inquiry concerning, iv, 345
  not at Wyoming massacre, iv, 346
  position among Iroquois, iv, 481
  raids made by, vi, 314
  recollections concerning, v, 672
  retreat from Fort Stanwix, vi, 290
  Schoharie attacked by, vi, 306
Brantz, Lewis, biography, iii, 336–337
  journal of journey, iii, 335–351
Bras Cassé, Chief, iii, 361, 363, 364
Brass plates, preserved by Creeks, v, 283
Brazil, derivation of name, iv, 562
  discoveries in, by Dr. Lund, ii, 319
  discovery of, iv, 562
  stature of tribes of, ii, 318
Brebeuf and Daniel, deaths, v, 647
  mission established by, v, 647
Breboeuf (Brebeuf), Father John de, vi, 734
  missionary to the Hurons, iv, 205
Breech-cloth. *See* Azian.
Brent, punitive expedition led by, vi, 135
Brenton, William, land granted to, v, 235
Bressani, Neutral Nation located by, iv, 207
Brest, island of, discovered by Cartier, vi, 49
Breton, Chief, ii, 259
British Government, policy toward the Colonies, vi, 283
  use of Indians by, vi, 274, 275, 277, 292–296
Britons, ancient, cruelties inflicted on, v, 34
Broad River, Catawba name for, iv, 155
Brock, Gen., vi, 359
Brodhead, John Romeyn, petition signed by, iii, 618
Broken Arrow, v, 254
  chiefs, iv, 579
  Creek town, iv, 563; v, 262
  location of village, v, 256
Bronze implements, possessed by Peruvians, v, 106
Brookfield, Mass., Indian attack on, vi, 158
Brothertons (Brothertowns), iv, 463; vi, 324
  account of, iv, 563
  also called Pequots, v, 41
  fragments of tribes absorbed by, vi, 133
  government, v, 504
  land confirmed to, vi, 324
  location, iii, 583
    map showing, iii, 96
  merged with Whites, v, 506
  migration, v, 520
  missionary work among, vi, 737, 739
  origin, v, 506, 519, 520
    of name, vi, 324
  population, i, 523; iii, 583; v, 506, 520; vi, 686, 707
Broulè Sioux. *See* Brules.
Brown, Basil, iii, 340
Brown, Catherine, ii, 35; vi, 503
  brief account of, iv, 563
  description, vi, 566
Brown, David, ii, 35
Brown, Gen., vi, 398
Brown, John W., petition signed by, iii, 618
Brown, Thomas (1), iii, 340
Brown, Thomas (2), lands purchased by, iv, 159
Brown, Col. Wm. Spencer, death, iv, 160

Browne, Peter A., acknowledgments by, III, 375–376
  discoveries, V, 288
  experiments, I, 41
  hair studied by, IV, 351–352
  paper by, on hair of Indians, III, 375–393
Browning, Lt., II, 114
Brown's Hole, I, 218, 219
Brownsville, or Red Stone, settlement of, VI, 596
Bruce, Dr., I, 159
Bruce, Mr., vocabulary by, II, 470
Brules (Broulè Sioux, Brulé Sioux), a Titon division, III, 629
  bands, III, 629
  census, VI, 713
  leading men, III, 629
  location, III, 629; V, 494
  population, V, 494
Brumley, Prof., mention of collection of, IV, 163, 168
Brushwood(s), an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
  population, II, 28
Buchanan, President, Indian affairs under, VI, 507–551
Buck, David A., explorations of, III, 131
Buckangaheela (Bukanjahela, Bukongehelas), Chief, IV, 614
  brief account of, IV, 563–564
  reference to speech by, VI, 300
  treaty signed by, VI, 344
Buctouche Indians, land granted to, V, 678
Budd's Inlet, Indians of, VI, 703
  population, V, 491
Buenaventura, settlements called, IV, 563
Buettner, Gottlob, missionary work of, V, 680, 682
Buffalo, curing of meat of, IV, 107
  description, IV, 92–93, 110
  disappearance, I, 217, 220
  domestication, discussed, V, 49–50
  extermination, IV, 94–95
  flesh as food, IV, 103, 105–106
  illustration of, IV, 93
  importance of, to Indians, V, 50
  method of cutting up, IV, 105–106
  name, discussion of, IV, 92
Buffalo—Continued
  parchment from hide, IV, 107
  range, IV, 92
  sense of smell, IV, 95
  size, IV, 97
  size of herds, IV, 93
  skinning, illustrated, IV, 105
  skins, exploits depicted on, V, 397
  See also Buffalo hunting.
Buffalo, Chief, VI, 385
Buffalo country, reached by Coronado, IV, 30
Buffalo-Eaters. *See* Koolsatik-ara.
Buffalo Hump, a Comanche chief, II, 128; III, 635
Buffalo Hunters (Querechos), VI, 72
Buffalo hunting, account of, IV, 93–94, 96; V, 49; VI, 389
  dangers, IV, 95, 98–99, 105, 108
  detailed description, IV, 101–110
  illustrations of, IV, 95, 96, 99
  net results, IV, 110
Buffalo Indians, a part of the Senecas, IV, 563
  distinguished members, IV, 563
Buffalo, N. Y., ancient name of, IV, 200
  Indian attack on, VI, 368
  Indian names for, IV, 563
Buffalo Reservation, census, VI, 690
  location, VI, 690
Buffon, opinion regarding Indian tribes, III, 55
Bug-on-a-ke-shig, a Chippewa chief, IV, 563
  brief biography, II, 167
  pipe-bearer to the chief, II, 166
  war chief of Ojibwas, II, 151
Buildings, antique Peruvian, V, 89–95
    illustrated, V, 94
  northern limit of, IV, 123, 662
Bukanjahela, Bukongehelas. *See* Buckangaheela.
Bully, The, a Seminole chief, brief account of, V, 261
Burari, an Orinoco tribe, IV, 564
Burbeck, Capt., V, 253
Burdens, method of carrying, II, 76, 115
Bureau of Indian Affairs, information furnished by, VI, 414
Burgoyne, Gen., surrender of, VI, 291
  military expedition of, VI, 284

Burial customs, I, 102–105, 354–356; V, 78–79, 109; VI, 618–623
  Acaxee Indian, III, 516
  Algonquin, V, 81
  Apache, V, 212
  Athapascan, V, 179
  Aztec, VI, 589
  California Indian, III, 140; V, 217
  Chickasaw, I, 310
  Chippewa, V, 64, 79; VI, 664–665
  Clear Lake Indian, III, 108, 112
  Comanche, I, 237; II, 133–134; V, 685
  concerning charms, I, 86–87
  concerning food, I, 33, 38–39, 83–84
  concerning warriors, IV, 53
  Creek, V, 270
  Dacota, II, 199; IV, 65–66
  for distinguished men, I, 262
  for women, II, 68
  Illinois Valley Indians, III, 155
  illustration showing, VI, 617
  Iroquois, III, 193
  Kenisteno, V, 167–168
  Klamath River Indians, III, 140, 175
  Mexican, V, 29
  Navajo, IV, 213–214
  Ojibwa, II, 138
  Oregon Indian, III, 217; V, 655
  Pawnee, II, 68
  Peruvian, V, 29, 81, 90–91
  prairie tribes, II, 70, 71
  Province of Mechuacan, IV, 449
  proving belief in immortality, III, 60
  Pueblo, IV, 75, 78
  Santee, IV, 156–157
  sequence in, I, 102
  Sioux, II, 97
  Tecullies, V, 29
  Wee-yot, III, 128
  Winnebago, IV, 54–55
  See also Bone-pickers; Burial grounds; Burial mounds; Burials; Cremation; Grave-posts; Graves; Mourning customs; Scaffold burials.
Burial grounds, illustration of, II, 97
  site selected for, II, 69, 97
Burial mounds, discussion and explanation of, IV, 129–130
Burial urn. *See* Funeral urn.
Burials, address to corpse, II, 68
  artifacts from, I, 68
  dress of corpse, IV, 54
  flexed, of the Congarees, IV, 160
  in canoes, V, 655, 693; VI, 617, 619, 620–622
    illustrated, VI, 617
  in caves, I, 102; VI, 619
  in mounds, III, 78; IV, 125, 126, 129–130
  in ossuaries, I, 102–105; VI, 618
  in sitting posture, IV, 54, 65–66; V, 270
  in urns, IV, 162–163; VI, 576, 589
  of living with the dead, II, 71
  of the Algonquins, VI, 110
  orientation in, II, 69
  Peruvian, artifacts from, V, 91–92, 93
  Peruvian, described, V, 657–658
  Peruvian, illustration of, V, 658
  pottery found in, I, 83–84; III, 77; IV, 161
  sites selected for, I, 355; II, 69
  Yuma, II, 117
  See also Burial customs; Canoe burials; Cave burials; Ossuaries; Scaffold burials; Tumuli.
Burias, a tribe on the Marañon River, IV, 564
Burrows, J. E., population report by, VI, 693
Busbanza, a New Grenada settlement, IV, 564
Bushman Boy, illustration of hair, III, 378
  measurements of hair, III, 384
Bushy Run, fight at, with Indians, IV, 564, 615
Busk, a Choctaw ceremonial, IV, 564
  ceremony of, described, I, 272–273; V, 267–268; VI, 631
  Muscogee feast, III, 89
  offenses cancelled at, I, 277
Busongote, ruins of, IV, 564
Butler, Capt., VI, 230
Butler, Col., III, 334
Butler, Gen., death of, VI, 336
Butler, George, report on Cherokees, IV, 588
Butler, Col. John, battle of forces under, VI, 309
  expedition organized by, VI, 297

- Butler, Richard, Indian Commissioner, vi, 323
  - treaty concluded by, vi, 327
- Butler, William, vocabulary transmitted by, ii, 209
- Butler, Maj. Zebulon, v, 671
- Butler and Davis, population figured by, i, 518
- Butte des Morts, origin of name, vi, 194
  - treaty made at, vi, 422
- Buttrick, Rev. Mr., iv, 385
- Buxaloons, location of town of, iv, 564
- Bwoin, Chippewa term for Sioux, v, 40
  - origin of name, v, 40
- Bwoinais, Chippewa warrior, war songs of, ii, 61–62
- Byainswa. *See* Bianswa.

C

- Caballo-en-Pilo, war chief, mentioned, ii, 114–115
- Cabeça de Vaca (Caba de Vaca), ii, 28, 29
  - expedition accompanied by, iv, 23
  - expedition described by, vi, 45, 47
  - wanderings of, ii, 21; vi, 743
  - *See also* De Vaca, Caba.
- Cabiyun, Chippewa name in traditions, v, 570
- Cabot [John], discoveries of, vi, 743
- Cabot, Sebastian, explorations, ii, 19
  - reference to voyage of, v, 676
- Cabotian Mountains, a transverse watershed, i, 185–186
- Cabral, Pedro Alvarez, discovery by, iv, 563
- Cache Valley, Indians of, vi, 697, 698
- Cachenah, a California chief, vi, 711
- Cachipo, mission of Barcelona Province, iv, 556
- Caciques, Aztec, rights of, v, 102
  - dwellings, ii, 83; iv, 125
  - *See also* Chiefs.
- Cacupas. *See* Co-co-pah.
- Cadaracqui, Indian name of Lake Ontario, iv, 382
  - the present Kingston, iv, 382
- Caddo language, tribes speaking, v, 682, 712
  - vocabulary, v, 709–712
- Caddodaques, a synonym of Caddoes, v, 570
- Caddoes (Caddos, Caddow, Cadrons), v, 570; vi, 686
  - allies of the French, vi, 237
  - and others, location, vi, 704
    - population, vi, 704, 708
  - country occupied by, i, 240; iii, 585, 596; vi, 705
  - dwellings, v, 682
  - form of prayer, v, 685
  - land relinquished to, vi, 455
  - lands ceded by, ii, 601, 602; vi, 461
  - linguistic family, iii, 402
  - origin tradition, v, 682
  - population, i, 518, 523; iii, 585, 596, 609, 635; v, 702; vi, 686, 699
  - relations with Texans, v, 712
  - treaty with, v, 499
  - statistics on land of, ii, 605
- Caddos, Caddow. *See* Caddoes.
- Cadillac, M. de La Motte, Detroit founded by, vi, 185, 382
- Cadmus, letters carried into Greece by, v, 88
- Cadotte, John Baptist, account of, ii, 148–149
- Cadrons, a Siouan tribe, vi, 34
  - given as synonym of Caddoes, vi, 686
  - migration tradition, v, 98
- Cafatchique, ii, 34
  - De Soto's march to, iii, 37
  - location, ii, 27
- Caffres, physical characteristics, iv, 363
- Caghnawagas. *See* Caughnawagas.
- Cahokia, trading post at, vi, 196, 269
- Cahokia mound, iv, 128
  - size, ii, 85
- Cahokias (Catokiah, Kahokias), annuities of, ii, 588
  - creation myth, iv, 135–136
  - descendants of mound builders, iv, 135
  - friendly to the French, vi, 237
  - missionary work among, vi, 734, 735
  - *See also* Kerokias.
- Cah-wee-os, a desert tribe, ii, 116
  - location, ii, 116
- Caillargè, M., iii, 355

Cairns. *See* Stone heaps.
Cajuenches, map showing location, III, 96
Calapelins (Calespelins, Colespelin), VI, 686
  population, I, 521; VI, 686, 701
  See also Kalispel.
Calapooya (Calipoas, Callahpoewah, Callapooyas, Callapuyas, Callipooyas), clothing, III, 219
  location, III, 201, 572; V, 492; VI, 686
    maps showing, III, 96, 200
  menstrual customs, V, 664
  population, I, 521; III, 201, 572, 609, 682; V, 492; VI, 686, 701
  See also Kalapuya.
Calasthocle, location, III 571
  population, III, 571
  See also Quinaielt.
Calendar stone, Mexican, allusion to, IV, 483; VI, 581
  description, VI, 590–591
  period, V, 30
Calendar system, Aztec, I, 42–43
  Chinese, I, 42
  Comanche, II, 129
  Creek, V, 276–277
  Massachusetts Indian, I, 285
  Mexican, III, 516
  of Hindostan and Java, reference to, I, 42
  of the Blackfeet, V, 183–184
  of the Kenistenos, V, 171
  of the Moquis, IV, 87
  of the Muscogee, I, 271–272
  of the Sioux, II, 177
  Persian, I, 41
  Toltec, accuracy of, V, 30
  Winnebago, IV, 239–240
Calespelins. *See* Calapelins.
Calhoun, Gov, J. S., population report by, III, 633; V, 484; VI, 709
Calhoun, John C., III, 196; IV, 137
  letter from, to the President, III, 575–580
  policy, VI, 383
  remains on estate of, I, 47; VI, 182
  treaty concluded by, VI, 402
  views on removal of Indians, VI, 409–415
Calico Rock, description of, IV, 316
California, ancient mine in, I, 101
  decline of Spanish proprietors in, III, 100–101
  discussion of removal of Indians to, V, 461–471
  gold deposits, I, 151
  Indian census, I, 520
  Indian population, I, 523; III, 112, 116, 634
  northwestern, crops, III, 102
    expedition through, III, 99–177
  population and area, IV, 610
  size of estates in, III, 101
  southern, Indian population, IV, 608
  southern, physical geography, II, 99–118
California Indians, IV, 221–226; V, 214–217; VI, 686
  absence of antiquities among, IV 226
  appearance, III, 140
  beard, II, 322
  classification, V, 217
  clothing, III, 127, 140, 141
  coast, population, VI, 711
  color, II, 320
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  customs, V, 649–650
  dwellings, V, 216
  food, V, 80
  illustrations showing, V, 80, 217
  interior, habits, VI, 616
    north of San Francisco, VI, 711
  journal describing, III, 99–177
  languages, III, 126–127, 420–423; IV, 406–415; V, 217
  legislation concerning, V, 459–461
  manners and customs, V, 214–217
  northern, dialects, III, 420–423
  origin, discussed, V, 216
  ornaments, illustrated, III, 69
  population, III, 112, 116; V, 217, 484; VI, 686, 705, 710, 711
    by counties, VI, 715
  religious beliefs, IV, 407
  reply to inquiries concerning, III, 200–225
  skull, illustrated, II, 335
  southern, report on, IV, 608
  See also under tribal names.
California missions. *See* Missions, California.

Caligoa, reached by De Soto, vi, 66
Calipoas. *See* Calapooya.
Call, Gov., military forces under, vi, 477
Callahpoewah, Callapooyas, Callapuyas, Callipooyas. *See* Calapooya.
Callo, description of ruin near, v, 94
Caloait (Calooit), population, i, 521; vi, 701
  See also Skilloot.
Calooit. *See* Caloait.
Calumet, made of steatite, v, 178
  use by Pontiac, ii, 251–252
  See also Pipes
Calvert, Leonard, landing in Maryland, vi, 128
Calwawesit, chief of the Yah Shutes, vi, 702
Camanches. *See* Comanches.
Camas, preparation for food, v, 656
Cambreling, C. C., petition signed by, iii, 618
Camp, moving of, ii, 76, 79
Campbell, Capt., death, vi, 341
  in action at Presque Isle, vi, 340
Campbell, assault on camp of, vi, 360
Campbell, Lt. Col., vi, 256
Campbell, Maj., held as hostage by Indians, ii, 258, 264, 273
  murder by Indians, ii, 214, 294; vi, 245
  part taken in siege of Detroit, ii, 247, 250, 256, 257, 262, 279, 288, 290, 294.
Campbell [Thomas], Indians described by, v, 411
Cana mission, data on, iv, 588
Canada, discussion of name, i, 305; v, 570; vi, 57
  French explorations in, v, 646–648
  lost by France, ii, 240; v, 528
  upper posts in 1778, iii, 333
Canada West, ossuaries in, i, 103
Canadesaga, derivation of name, iv, 384
Canadian mission, data on, iv, 588
Canal at Casa Grande, iii, 300, 302, 305
Canal de Principe, Indians living on, v, 487
Canal d'la Reido, Indians living on, v, 487
Canandaigua, destruction, vi, 310
  treaty, vi, 326
Canar, citadel and palace of, described, v, 94
Canary Islands, supposed derivation of name, v, 28
Canassatego (Canissatego, Cannassatega, Connassatego), iii, 57, 74; vi, 148
  oratory of, v, 518
  speech made by, iii, 197
    to the Delawares, iv, 618; v, 137
    quoted, iii, 183–184; v, 142
  story told by, iv, 344
Canawahrunas. *See* Caughnawaga.
Candelaria, mission of Barcelona Province, iv, 556
Canees, location, v, 571
Canissatego. *See* Canassatego.
Canisteo, meaning of name, v, 669
Canitas, estimate of warriors, iii, 557
  See also Caouitas; Cowetas.
Cannibalism, a sacrificial ceremony, ii, 145
  among the Caribs, v, 28
  among the Comanches, i, 235
  among the Sioux, ii, 172; iii, 242
  at virgin feast, ii, 145
  Athapascan, discussion of, v, 179
  case of, described, vi, 144
  cause of, among the Sioux, ii, 172
  explanation of, ii, 146
  in warfare, ii, 276, 285
  of the Attacapas, iii, 544
  tales of, discounted, iii, 359
Canning, reference to mental labors of, iv, 504
Canoe burials, detailed description of, vi, 620–622
  discovery, vi, 622
  illustration of, vi, 617
  mummy found in, v, 693
  practiced by Chinooks, vi, 617
  Waskow and Chinook, v, 655
Canoemen. *See* Etchemins.
Canoes, art exhibited in, v, 394–395
  bark, illustration of, ii, 512
    making, ii, 512–513
  of Massachusetts Indians, i, 285
  of Algonquins, vi, 110
  of California Indians, iii, 142, 218
  of Chippewas, iv, 57
  of Dacotahs, iv, 67
  of Florida Indians, v, 95

Canoes—Continued
  of Oregon tribes, III, 218
  of Winnebagoes, IV, 57
  Ottowa, feat accomplished in, V, 395
  Ottowa, illustration of, V, 95
  shaped by fire, I, 76
  superseded by horses, VI, 617
  See also Canoe burials.
Canonchet, VI, 164
  activities and death, VI, 154
  capture and death, VI, 166–167
Canonicus, VI, 125
  chief of Narragansetts, VI, 111
  conservative course of, VI, 167
  Rhode Island sold by, VI, 166
Canostogas. *See* Conestogo.
Canses, estimate of warriors, III, 557, 559
  location, III, 559
  See also Kansas Indians.
Caonabo, II, 309
Caouitas, III, 559
  warriors, estimates of, III, 557, 559
  See also Cowetas.
Capac, V, 102
Capaha, Chief, attacked by De Soto, IV, 321
Capaha tribe, synonym of Quappas, III, 48, 50
  attacked by Kaskaskias, III, 48
  See also Quappas.
Cape Charles, naming, VI, 96
  tribes in vicinity of, VI, 131
Cape Cod, discovery, VI, 95
  naming, VI, 103
  tribes in vicinity of, V, 218
Cape Flattery, Indians of, IV, 598, 599; VI, 703
Cape Flattery Indians, population, I, 521; V, 491
Cape Fox Indians, V, 489
  census, V, 489
  language, V, 489
Cape Hatteras, lost colony at, VI, 182
Cape Henry, naming, VI, 96
  tribe occupying, VI, 131
Cape Scott, Indians of, V, 488
Capital punishment among the Creeks, I, 276
Cap-o-co-mah, Sac Indian, hair of, III, 382
Caps, Navajo, described, IV, 435
    illustrated, IV, 74
  winter, described, III, 68
    illustrated, III 68
Captives, adoption of, III, 186, 189; IV, 53; V, 137
  burned at the stake, II, 142–143
  end of burning of, II, 146
  made into slaves, V, 654
  release by Indians, VI, 262, 299
  running the gauntlet by, V, 672
  sacrificed by Pawnees, IV, 50–51
  sale, I, 232
  taking by the Sioux, III, 241
  torture, V, 77
  treatment, I, 235; II, 115, 116, 132, 276; III, 188–189; IV, 53, 62–63; V, 280
Capuchins, missionary work, VI, 734
Carankoways (Charankouas), a Texas tribe, V, 571
  language, III, 544
Cardenas, Don Garcia Lopez de, explorations of, IV, 25, 38–39
Cardinal points, determination by Indians, IV, 130–131
  personification, VI, 659
Carey, Matthew, IV, 132
Carib language, words derived from, VI, 36
Caribou. *See* Reindeer.
Caribs, V, 28; VI, 36, 615
  basket-press made by, IV, 446
  possible descent, V, 28
  Spanish policy toward, III, 23
  See also Anacoana.
Carlotsapo, a California chief, VI, 711
Carlton, Thomas, report signed by, V, 700
Carno-san-tua, a Comanche chief, I, 235
Carolina. *See* North Carolina; South Carolina.
Carolina tribes, evidence showing origin, IV, 170
  tribal relations, VI, 179
Caroline Islands, pictograph by native of, I, 430
Carondolet, Gov., VI, 420
Carp River, census of Indians of, I, 458–467
  inscription on rocks, I, 406

Carpenter, Wm. W., travels, IV, 452–453

Carr, Mrs., daughter of Brant, III, 292

Carr, Rev. J. H., school conducted by, V, 694

Carriers, a synonym of Tahculi, III, 401
  See also Tacullies.

Carrol, Commissioner, VI, 475

Carr's Inlet Indians, population, V, 491; VI, 703
  location, V, 491
  tribal name, VI, 703

Carrying strap (apecun), common use of, II, 76, 515
  illustrated, II, 516

Carson River, peculiarity of, V, 201

Carson Valley, Indians of, V, 201

Cartas de Cortez, VI, 577

Cartier, Jacques, attempted intimidation of, V, 76
  effect of expeditions of, II, 22
  explorations, I, 134–135, 305; V, 646; VI, 48–57, 743
  observations, II, 22; V, 107
  voyage of, V, 676

Carver, Jonathan, VI, 269
  cave described by, II, 99
  Pontiac's death reported by, II, 308
  travels, I, 138

Carving, in obsidian, VI, 579
  on implements and cradles, IV, 72
  See also Sculpture.

Cary, mission of Barcelona Province, IV, 556

Casa Grande, description of, III, 299–301, 302, 304
  illustration of, III, 302
  ruins in vicinity of, III, 302–303

Cascade Canal, Indians living on, V, 487

Cascade, Little Colorado, described, IV, 38

Cascades, population, III, 632; V, 490, 493, 705, 706; VI, 700, 701
  position, V, 490

Case and Redman, I, 173

Case-nau, III, 144

Case's Inlet, Indians on, V, 703; VI, 703

Case's Inlet Indians, population, V, 491
  position, V, 491

Casey, Capt. J. C., vocabulary by, II, 220; III, 404

Casey, Lt., vocabulary prepared by, V, 689

Casqui (Casque) Indians, De Soto's alliance with, VI, 66
  identified as Kaskaskias (q. v.), III, 48

Casqui (Casque, Casquin) village, De Soto at, III, 48, 50; IV, 320; VI, 66
  Illinois village, probably, III, 50

Cass, Gen. Lewis, VI, 364
  activities in Michigan, VI, 383
  expedition, I, 141–142
  incident connected with, VI, 386
  Indian population estimated by, V, 480
  influence on Indian relations, VI, 381
  quoted on fire worship, V, 67
    on mounds, IV, 125–126
    on use of pictographs, VI, 387–392
  report made by, III, 608
  services rendered by, VI, 405, 422
  treaty negotiated by, VI, 421

Cass Lake, former Indian name of, VI, 384
  Indians of, V, 185

Cassava. *See* Mandioca.

Cassina, black-drink made of, V, 266

Cassita town, V, 254

Castañeda's narrative, vague style of, IV, 32

Caste, among the Hindoos, V, 58, 59
  lack of, among Indians, I, 38; III, 61; V, 59

Castine, VI, 174

Castine, Baron de, activities, VI, 156–157
  relations with Indian tribes, VI, 155–156

Cat Island, landing place of Columbus, IV, 554

Cat Nation (or tribe), a name for the Eries, III, 289; VI, 148
  affiliations with Neuter Nation, III, 290
  discussion of identity, III, 290; IV, 382
  language spoken, III, 290
  use of name, IV, 202
  See also Eries.

Catabas. *See* Catawbas.

Catamenial customs. *See* Menstrual customs.

Cataracqui, derivation of the name, IV, 384
Catawba language, distinct nature of, III, 404
  relation to the Woccoa, III, 292, 406
  vocabulary, V, 557–558
Catawbas (Catabas), IV, 617; VI, 179, 182, 215, 686
  at war with Uchees, III, 27
  linguistic family, III, 401
  Carolina manuscript on origin, III, 293–296
  character, III, 295
  classification, II, 343
  conspiracy entered into by, IV, 158
  country occupied by, II, 36; III, 559, 583; VI, 705
  decrease in numbers, III, 295
  divisions, III, 293
  flight from Lake region, II, 36, 343; III, 288–289
  head flattening among, II, 325
  identified as Eries, III, 405; VI, 149
  land claimed by, III, 583
  language, II, 86; III, 292, 404
  migration, IV, 163, 606
  origin, III, 291–292, 293–296, 405; IV, 382; V, 42
    of name, III, 288, 292
  population, I, 524; III, 583; VI, 179, 272, 686, 705
  relations with Cherokees, III, 293
  settlement in South Carolina, III, 293
  subordinate tribes of, VI, 179
  warfare, III, 196, 294
  warriors, estimate of, III, 555, 559
  See also Kershaws; Totiris.
Catelamet. *See* Cathlamet.
Cateracqua, I, 178
Catherine, Empress of Russia, interest in languages, V, 53
  vocabularies collected by, II, 356
Catharinestown (Catherine's Town), American army at, VI, 310
  named for Catharine Montour, V, 672
Catherwood, F., drawings made by, IV, 151
Cathlacumups (Cathlacommatups), location, III, 570, 571
  population, III, 570, 571
  See also Willamette Indians.
Cathlamahs. *See* Cathlamet.
Cathlamet (Catelamet, Cathlamahs, Kathlamet, Kathlamit), location, III, 571
  population, I, 521; III, 571, 609; VI, 701, 702
Cathlanaquiahs, location, III, 570
  population, III, 570
Cathlapotle. *See* Quathlapohtle.
Catholic religion, Indian attitude toward, VI, 191
  See also Jesuits; Missions; Roman Catholic Church. V, 77
Catlin, George, V, 54 I, 425,
II, 321 erroneous statement of, II, 176
  unreliability, III, 254 II, 321 ff
Catly, John, arrest of, IV, 593 V, 51
Catokiah. *See* Cahokias.
Cattaraugus, Oneidas at, VI, 706
  Onondagas at, VI, 706
  Senecas at, I, 441–457; VI, 706
Cattaraugus Reservation, census, VI, 690
  description, II, 539
  location, VI, 690
Catugajay Creek division, census, I, 508–517
Catumsie, a Comanche chief, III, 635
Caucasian race, branches, IV, 356
  civilization, IV, 356
  heads described, IV, 356
Caughnawaga (Caghnawagas, Canawahrunas, Caunawagaes, Conawaghrunas), at Braddock's defeat, VI, 218
  country occupied by, III, 559
  missionary work among, VI, 737
  warriors, number of, III, 553, 559; VI, 270
  See also Coghnawagas; Cognawagoes.
Caujuckos, IV, 339
  See also Cayugas.
Caunawagas. *See* Caughnawaga.
Causeways, built by the Indians, IV, 135
Cavallada, appointed as chief, IV, 87
Cave burials, frequent results, VI, 619
  permanent nature, I, 102

Caves, in Sioux country, described, ii, 95–96
  near Hagerstown, Md., described, iii, 338
  of Winoca, described, iv, 306
Cawanesque, meaning of name, v, 669
Cayambe, burials at, v, 90–91
  description of ruins near, v, 94
Cayas, identified as Kanzas, iv, 310
Cayas, Province of, sought by De Soto, iii, 50; vi, 66
Cayenderongue, a Mohawk sachem, iii, 189
Cayouses. *See* Cayuse.
Cayuckers, warriors, iv, 605
  See also Cayugas.
Cayuga language, vocabulary, ii, 482–493
Cayugas, an Iroquois division, iv, 204
  and Iroquois, population, i, 523
  and Senecas, census, vi, 718
  at Siege of Fort Stanwix, vi, 292
  census, v, 504–505; vi, 715
  classification, iii, 401
  conference with, v, 667
  cranial measurements, ii, 335
  decrease in number, iv, 604–605
  effect on, of Revolutionary War, v, 506
  fight with Andastes, vi, 140
  government, v, 504
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
  in the Revolutionary War, v, 513; vi, 283, 285
  land ceded by, vi, 324, 334
  location, i, 441; iii, 583, 590; v, 668; vi, 147, 275, 705, 714
  missionary work among, vi, 734, 735
  number on reservations, ii, 539, 540
  of Cattaraugus, census, i, 441–457
  one of the Five Nations, iii, 184
  one of the Six Nations, iv, 616
  population, iii, 583, 590; iv, 603, 604; v, 668; vi, 275, 694, 705, 706, 707, 714
  removal, vi, 516
    to Quinté, vi, 139
  warriors, number of, iii, 561; vi, 261, 270
  See also Cayuckers; Gogouins.
Cayuse (Cayouses), vi, 613; vi, 686
  classification, iii, 402
  country occupied by, i, 224; v, 493; vi, 700
  hunting ground, i, 221
  lands, nature of, v, 656
  map showing location, iii, 96
  marriage customs, v, 654
  massacre by, at mission, v, 653, 655
  medicine men, v, 652
  population, i, 521; iii, 632; v, 493, 705, 707; vi, 686, 700, 701
  See also Waulatpus; Willetpos; Yeletpo.
Cekaas, Chief, at Fort Detroit, ii, 268
Celtic element, suggestion of, in Indian culture, v, 86
Celtic inscription, supposed, discussed, iv, 118
Census, Indian, after conquest of Canada, vi, 270–273
  Algonquin group, i, 458–497
  and statistics, iii, 617–628
  Appalachian group, i, 505–517
  Dacota group, i, 498–504
  Iroquois group, i, 441–457
  need of, v, 486
  object of, i, 196; v, 486
  provision made for, iii, 283
  recorded in symbolic characters, ii, 222
  tables showing, i, 439–524; vi, 686–718
  taking of, v, 479–486
  undertaken by the French, vi, 685
  See also Population; Warriors; and under tribal names.
Census taking, Indian aversion to, iii, 249
Ceremonies, at Barcluxor, described, vi, 130
  at starting of war-party, iv, 52
  Black-drink, v, 266–267
  connected with burials, iii, 60, 108, 140, 175
  connected with corn planting, vi, 496
  Creek, square for, v, 264–268
  Green Corn, illustrated, vi, 385
  Indian attitude toward, vi, 212
  Indian, in church at Christmas, iv, 73

- Ceremonies—Continued
  - Initiation, V, 426–433
  - Kenisteno, V, 168–171
  - Moqui, IV, 82, 83–84
  - Muscogee, of the brass plates, V, 660
  - Navajo, at sacred spring, IV, 213
  - of Creek Busk, I, 272–273; V, 267–268; VI, 631
  - of cremation, described, IV, 225–226
  - of curing the sick, V, 437–441; VI, 619–620, 659
  - of ear piercing, III, 239
  - of human sacrifice, IV, 50–51
  - of Jossakeed's lodge, V, 421–422
  - of Rabbit feast, IV, 78
  - of receiving strangers, IV, 343
  - of release from bonds, IV, 645
  - of sacred fire, V, 65–66
  - of "striking the post," III, 64
  - of the new corn, VI, 631
    - illustrated, VI, 385
  - of the Thunderbirds, illustrated, VI, 353
  - of White Dog Sacrifice, IV, 591
  - Osage, described, IV, 274–275
  - puberty, VI, 633
  - rain making, IV, 82, 83–85
  - religious, of the Natchez, VI, 627
  - root chewing, of warriors, V, 71
  - sacrificial, described, V, 66
  - structure used for, I, 337
  - sunrise, V, 68, 170
  - tribal characteristics shown in, V, 434
  - warriors', corn-cake, IV, 274–275
  - *See also* Busk; Customs; Dances; Feasts; Ordeals; Sacrifices; Tobacco.
- Cexeninuth. *See* Exeninuth.
- Chaahl. *See* Kow welth.
- Chabot, Philip, VI, 48
- Chacta, proposed name for Choctaw, V, 498
- Chactaws. *See* Choctaws.
- Chaghnet, tribes dwelling at, VI, 714
- Chakope, a Sioux chief, I, 352
- Chalaacpauley, a Creek town, V, 212
- Chalagatsca, a Lower Creek town, V, 262
- Chalakee, mention of name, V, 98
  - proposed name for Cherokee, V, 498
- Chalas, country occupied by, III, 559
  - number of warriors, III, 553, 559
- Chalcas, III, 515
- Chal Nah, chief of Tutoten tribes, VI, 702
- Chamberlain, Lt. Reuben, mention of, IV, 629
- Champlain [Samuel de], among the Milicites, V, 674
  - founding of Quebec by, V, 647
  - in Indian wars, III, 73–74
  - Neutrals erroneously located by, IV, 204
  - observations of, V, 107
  - relations with Indians, V, 647
- Chanco, plot revealed by, VI, 99
- Chants, of Dacota doctor, IV, 649
  - of Medicine-man, translation, VI, 655
  - Saginaw, of the Hawk, III, 329–330
  - use in Medicine Dance, IV, 643–644
  - words and meaning, I, 383–386, 398–401
  - *See also* Songs; Music.
- Chanwappan. *See* Shamwappoms.
- Chapoton, M., negotiations with Indians, II, 256, 257
- Character, Indian, discussion of, I, 261, 315–430; II, 434; V, 243–248, 409–411, 449
  - of Oregon and California tribes, III, 207
  - of the Shoshonees, I, 213
- Characteristics, Indian, general discussion of, I, 13–16
- Charankouas. *See* Carankoways.
- Charcowah, location, III, 572
  - population, III, 572, 609
- Charleston, S. C., Indians of vicinity of, V, 42
- Charlevoix [Pierre de], cited on origin theories, V, 82
  - cited on sun worship, VI, 626
  - journey of, VI, 197
  - observations of, V, 109
  - quoted on Indian customs, V, 52–53
  - quoted on Indian mentality, III, 56
  - perpetual fire, VI, 627–628
  - travels, I, 137
- Char lo har jo co cho ko ne, a Coweta Town chief, IV, 579
- Charlotte, Camp, treaty concluded at, VI, 266

- Charms, discussion of, i, 85–87
  - Moqui, to bring rain, iii, 308
  - use by Comanches, ii, 127
  - used for hunting, v, 76
  - *See also* Amulets; Magic; Witchcraft.
- Charnel houses, lacking among the Sioux, iv, 55
  - lacking among the Winnebagoes, iv, 55
  - *See also* Ossuaries.
- Charruas, of Rio de la Plata, color of, ii, 320
- Chase, M., iii, 384
- Chastacosta. *See* Shistacoostee.
- Chastelleux, v, 53
- Chastity, observance by war-party, iv, 63
- Chatalhakeah, chief of the Cosulhentan, vi, 702
- Chatam's Sound, tribes of, v, 487
- Chatas, number of warriors, iii, 553
- Chat chee nie, census, v, 489
  - language of, v, 489
- Chatchini. *See* Chat chee nie.
- Chateaubriand, v, 53
- Chatemuc, Mohigan name for Hudson River, vi, 504
- Cha tok sof ke, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
- Chats, a synonym of Eries, ii, 301; iv, 382
  - synonym of Shawnees, ii, 285; v, 41
- Chatsops. *See* Clatsops.
- Chattahoochee. *See* Chattahoosee.
- Chattahoosee (Chattahootchie, Chattahotchee, Chattohoche), a Lower Creek town, v, 262
  - derivation of name, iv, 381, 385; v, 572
- Chattahoosee River, brief description of, v, 256
- Chauctaws. *See* Choctaws.
- Chauenous, number of warriors, iii, 555
  - *See also* Shawnee.
- Chaui. *See* Grand Pawnees.
- Chaumont, Peter M. J., missionary labors of, iv, 206–207
- Chau-te-uh, a California band, iii, 116
- Chauvignerie (Chaurignerie), Mons., reference to manuscript of, iii, 282
  - tables based on report of, iii, 553–557
- Chawai, a synonym of Cheyenne (q. v.), ii, 343
- Chayennes. *See* Cheyennes.
- Chaymas, of upper Orinoco, stature of, ii, 318
- Che ar haw, an Upper Creek Town, iv, 578
- Cheattee, census, v, 493
  - location, vi, 702
  - population, vi, 702
- Chebiàbo (Chebiabose), a mythological character, v, 149, 409
- Cheboigan band, census, i, 478–487
- Chedochog, a California chief, vi, 711
- Cheehales, Cheenales. *See* Chehalis.
- Cheesca village, attacked by De Soto, iii, 47
- Chegoimegon, vi, 269
  - ancient Chippewa village, v, 147
  - council seat of the Odjibwa, v, 39
- Chehalis (Cheehales, Cheenales, Chehaylis, Chihalis), iii, 632; vi, 686
  - and others, population of, v, 705
  - intermarriage of, with other tribes, vi, 703
  - language, iv, 600
  - location, iv, 599; v, 703; vi, 703
  - maps showing location, iii, 96, 200
  - population, i, 521; iv, 599; v, 703; vi, 686, 701, 703
  - *See also* Chickalees; Chillates; Chiltz, Ehihalis; Tsihailish.
- Chehau villages, v, 256
  - on Flint River, v, 254
- Che haw Town, a Creek town, iv, 576, 578
  - leading men of, iv, 576
- Che haw ah, a Lower Creek town, iv, 578, 580
- Chehaylis. *See* Chehalis.
- Chell-o-kee dialect, vocabulary, ii, 220–221
  - *See also* Cherokee language.
- Chelmsford, attacked by Indians, vi, 164
- Chelucconinny, a Lower Creek town, v, 262

- Chemeguabas, III, 298
  - map showing location, III, 96
- Chemehuevi. *See* Chemeguabas.
- Chemetunne. *See* Yahshute.
- Chemovi, population, I, 519
- Chemung River, meaning of name, IV, 384; V, 669
  - tribes in vicinity, V, 667, 668
- Chenook. *See* Chinooks.
- Chenoquot, origin of the name, IV, 559
- Chenos, Huron, census of, I, 458–467
- Chenouks. *See* Chinooks.
- Chepewas. *See* Chippewas.
- Chepeweyans, Chepewyans. *See* Chippewyans.
- Chepian, evil spirit of the Algonquins, VI, 630
- Cheppewyans, Cheppeyans. *See* Chippewyans.
- Cherakis. *See* Cherokees.
- Cheraws, country occupied by, II, 36
  - extinct dialect of, II, 344
  - union with Catawbas, III, 295
- Cherokee alphabet, V, 245
  - Bible story recorded in, II, 228
  - characters used in, II, 228
  - invented by Sequoia, or Guess, II, 228
  - outline, II, 228
  - publications in, IV, 542–544
  - *See also* Cherokee language.
- Cherokee and Buffalo division, census of, I, 508–517
- Cherokee lands, discussion of value, V, 500
  - sum awarded for, VI, 475
- Cherokee language, III, 596–597
  - adaptability, II, 455
  - classification, III, 401
  - peculiarities, II, 344
  - preservation, III, 96
  - principles, II, 443–456
  - publications in, IV, 542–544
  - vocabulary (numerals), II, 209–211
  - *See also* Allegewi language; Chell-o-kee dialect; Cherokee alphabet.
- Cherokee pottery, conclusion drawn from, IV, 385
- Cherokee River, former name of the Tennessee, VI, 238
- Cherokees (Cherakis), III, 555; IV, 614; V, 99; VI, 37, 215, 430, 686
  - abstract of census roll, IV, 582
  - agriculture among, VI, 530, 531
  - allies of the French, VI, 237
  - ancient home, II, 344
  - annuities, II, 584
  - at war with Uchees, III, 27
  - attitude in Creek war, VI, 369
  - capture of Fort Loudon by, VI, 287
  - census, I, 508–517; V, 504
  - Christianity among, VI, 530
  - color, II, 320–321
  - condition, after removal, VI, 480, 522–532
    - general, IV, 482–483; VI, 513–514
    - statistics on, IV, 588–589
  - conspiracy entered by, IV, 158
  - controversy with, VI, 474–478
  - convention to adjust dissensions among, VI, 501
  - council with Comanches, IV, 470
  - country occupied by, I, 508; III, 559, 584, 585, 596–597; V, 42; VI, 32, 179, 238, 704
  - cranial capacity, V, 244
    - measurements, II, 335
  - creation myth, IV, 136
  - De Soto in territory of, I, 134
  - descendants of mound-builders, IV, 135–136
  - desire to retrocede land, IV, 470–471
  - discussion of language, III, 596–597
  - dissension among, VI, 500–502, 503, 512–513
  - distinct from Appalachian group, V, 42
  - divisions, I, 508
  - emigration of part, VI, 488
  - evils suffered by, VI, 531–532
  - fiscal statistics relating to, VI, 722
  - forced migration, IV, 606
  - government, V, 504; VI, 530, 531
  - incursions into South Carolina, VI, 314–315
  - in North Carolina, VI, 688
  - intelligence, VI, 529
  - intermarriage with Scotch, VI, 351
  - intruders in Texas, I, 240
  - investments for, II, 561

- Cherokees (Cherakis)—Continued
  - lands, iv, 572, 574; vi, 519
    - ceded by, ii, 602; v, 483
    - claimed by, iii, 485, 581, 584; vi, 415
    - granted to, vi, 455
    - purchased from, ii, 594, 595, 598, 601
    - sale of, vi, 460–461
    - statistics on, ii, 605
    - value, vi, 490
  - legal name proposed for, v, 498
  - linguistic family, iii, 401
  - listed as a generic stock, vi, 31
  - map showing colonies, iv, 180
    - map showing location, iii, 96; v, 253; vi, 519
  - migration, supposed, v, 42
    - tradition, v, 98
  - mission churches, v, 698
  - missionary work among, vi, 734, 736, 738, 739, 740
  - movement to the West, v, 122
  - nationality preserved, iii, 96
  - numeral system, v, 244
  - of North Carolina, report on, iv, 607
  - outrage perpetrated by, iv, 471
  - peace concluded with, vi, 401
    - treaty with Osages, iv, 299
  - plans for removal, iii, 576, 577, 578; vi, 410–411, 412
  - population, i, 518, 523; iii, 584, 585, 596; iv, 574, 607; v, 483, 498; vi, 272, 480, 481, 530, 686, 690, 704, 708
  - reference to numerals of, v, 712
    - to treaty with, vi, 420
  - relations with Catawbas, iii, 293
    - with Whites, v, 278
  - removal, iv, 460, 484–485; vi, 401–402, 423, 436, 493, 515, 516
    - terms of, vi, 492
    - trouble regarding, vi, 466–467, 490–494
    - voluntary, v, 450
  - Scotch element in, vi, 351, 503–504
  - shape of skulls, ii, 317
  - slavery among, vi, 332, 442
  - state of advancement, v, 506
  - statistics on, attempt to gather, v, 482
  - sun worship practiced by, v, 103
  - synonyms of name, v, 42, 482; vi, 33
- Cherokees (Cherakis)—Continued
  - totems, iv, 666
  - treaty with, v, 500; vi, 238–239, 327, 334, 402, 425, 461, 492
  - war against, iv, 617
  - war of, with Chickasaws, i, 311
  - war with, vi, 238–241
  - warred on, by Iroquois, ii, 36, iii, 196
  - warriors, estimate of, iii, 555, 559
  - westward movement, vi, 420
  - within Neosho Colony, iv, 460
  - *See also* Achalaque; Allegans; Allegewy; Tallagewy.
- Cherr'h-quuh, a band of Bald Hill Indians, iii, 139
- Cherry Valley, reference to massacre in, vi, 298
- Chesapeake Bay, colony located on, vi, 96
  - Indians of, v, 38; vi, 129–130
  - name, derivation, iv, 379; v, 573; vi, 131
    - discussion, vi, 90
- Chesapeakes, location, vi, 86, 90
- Chetco. *See* Cheattee, Chet Ko.
- Chetimaches, a linguistic family, iii, 402
- Chet Ko, Indians of, vi, 702
- Chetleschantunne. *See* Chetlessentan.
- Chetlessentan (Chetlessentun), census, v, 493
  - location, vi, 702
  - population, vi, 702
- Chettakos, chief of the Chockreletan, vi, 702
- Chew, William, a Tuscarora chief, ii, 541
  - vocabulary obtained from, iv, 118
- Chewackala, a Lower Creek town, v, 262
- Che wok o lee (Eu fau la), a Lower Creek town, iv, 580
- Cheyenne language, characteristics, iii, 403–404
  - vocabulary, iii, 446–459
- Cheyenne River, tribe on, vi, 556
- Cheyennes (Chayennes), vi, 686
  - brief account of, i, 244; v, 573
  - census, vi, 556, 713
  - country occupied by, iii, 403, 595, 630; v, 494; vi, 556, 695, 705
  - divisions, iii, 630
  - element of a new group, i, 198
  - enemies of the Mandans, iii, 253

- Cheyennes (Chayennes)—Continued
  - indigenous to Kansas, vi, 536
  - language, iii, 595, 630
  - map showing location, ii, 28; iii, 96
  - migration, i, 259
  - population, i, 244, 245, 519, 523; iii, 595, 609, 630, 631; v, 494; vi, 686, 695, 696, 705
  - unclassified, ii, 33, 343
  - use of arrow by, i, 77
  - *See also* Shyennes.
- Chia. *See* Cia; Silla.
- Chiakanessou (Chickanossous), iii, 559
  - estimate of warriors, iii, 557, 559
- Chiamatla, iv, 32
- Chiametta, iv, 24
- Chiapas, antiquities in, vi, 582
- Chibiabos, a mythological being, i, 317
  - mention in legend, vi, 571
- Chibwa, a synonym of Chippewa (q. v.), v, 41
- Chicachos, iii, 555
  - number of warriors, iii, 555
  - *See also* Chickasaws.
- Chicacilla, De Soto at, iii, 46
- Chicago, derivation of name, iv, 379; v, 573
  - illustration of, in 1820, iv, 193
  - massacre of garrison at, v, 530; vi, 356, 359
  - treaty concluded at, vi, 393–395
  - tribes located at, vi, 385, 458
- Chicasa, classification, iii, 401
  - nearly identical with Chocta, iii, 401
  - *See also* Chickasaw.
- Chicaza (village), ii, 34
  - arrival of De Soto at, iii, 45
  - attack on De Soto at, vi, 62
  - character of buildings, iv, 124
  - location, iii, 45; iv, 132
  - *See also* Chickasaw.
- Chichemecas (Chichemecs, Chichimacos, Chichimecas, Chichimecs), and Acolhuans, dynasty of, v, 96
  - knowledge of metals, vi, 600
  - origin, i, 22–26
  - settling in Valley of Mexico, v, 95
  - Valley of Mexico occupied by, vi, 596, 742
- Chichiticala (Chichiticale), Coronado's expedition at, iv, 24, 32
  - location, iv, 32–33
  - ruins, iv, 24; vi, 70
- Chickahominy. *See* Chickahomones.
- Chickahomones, brief account of, v, 36
- Chickalees (Chickeeles), iii, 224
  - language, iv, 600
  - location, iii, 201
  - population, iii, 201
  - *See also* Chehalis.
- Chickanossous. *See* Chiakanessou.
- Chickasa, proposed legal name for Chickasaw, v, 498
- Chickasaw Bluffs, reached by De Soto, iii, 46, 47
- Chickasaw Old Fields, halting place of the Chickasaw, i, 309
- Chickasaws (Chickasas), v, 99; vi, 686
  - account of, v, 573
  - agriculture practiced by, v, 526, 529
  - and Choctaws, acres owned by, vi, 519
    - relations, vi, 527
    - treaty, vi, 484
    - union, iv, 472, 574, 582–583; vi, 460
  - annuities, ii, 584
  - Appalachian tribe, iii, 29
  - at battle of Mauvila, iii, 44
  - attendance at missions, v, 698
  - attitude in Creek war, vi, 369
  - beliefs, i, 310
  - census, i, 508–517; v, 504–505; vi, 690
    - roll, abstract of, iv, 582
  - classified as Appalachians, v, 42
  - condition and prospects, i, 312; iv, 587; v, 693–694
    - after removal, vi, 522–529
  - creation myth, iv, 136
  - descendants of mound-builders, iv, 135–136
  - De Soto, hostility to, vi, 62, 63, 65
    - in country of, ii, 34
  - district belonging to, i, 312
  - divisions, i, 508
  - emigration, vi, 488
  - fiscal statistics relating to, vi, 721 723
  - funds required for, ii, 567
  - geographical position, i, 508

Chickasaws (Chickasas)—Continued
- government, v, 504
- group including, I, 197
- intermarriage with Scotch, VI, 351
- investments for, II, 561
- lands, IV, 574
  - ceded by, II, 602; v, 482; VI, 459–460
  - claimed by, III, 584
  - petroleum on, I, 161
  - purchased from, II, 594, 595, 598, 600; v, 456
- language discussed, III, 596–597
- legal name proposed for, v, 498
- location, III, 559, 584, 597; VI, 32, 704
  - maps showing, III, 96; IV, 180; v, 253; VI, 519
- migration legend, I, 309–310
- missionary work among, VI, 738, 739
- neutrality in Creek war, VI, 403
- origin, reference to, v, 61, 98
- population, I, 523; III, 584, 597, 610; IV, 574; v, 498; VI, 272, 686, 704
- position in Revolutionary War, VI, 295
- progress, state of, v, 506
- relations with the Whites, v, 278
- removal, IV, 460, 484–485; v, 450; VI, 497, 516
  - agreement to, VI, 433, 435
  - plans for, III, 576, 578; VI, 412
  - policy during, VI, 476
- resistance to De Soto, III, 44–46
- slavery among, VI, 332
- statistics on, v, 482
  - on land of, II, 605
- stature, II, 318
- sun worship practiced by, v, 103
- traditions, VI, 403
- treaty made with, VI, 328, 334, 380
  - unusual provision of, VI, 445
- warriors, estimate of, III, 555, 559
- wars, I, 311
- westward movement, VI, 420
- within Neosho Colony, IV, 460
- *See also* Chicachos; Chicasa; Chicaza.

Chickasilla, camp of De Soto at, VI, 62

Chickeeles. *See* Chickalees.

Chicora (Chicorea), application of name, v, 42; VI, 179
- arrival of Ribault in, VI, 73
- attempted conquest of, III, 25–26

Chicora Indians (Chicoras), application of name, v, 573
- location, VI, 35
- relations with the French, VI, 73–74
- treacheries avenged by, VI, 743
- *See also* Chicorean group.

Chicorea. *See* Chicora.

Chicorean group (Chicoreans), VI, 37
- account of, II, 35–36
- country inhabited by, VI, 31–32, 39
- dispersal, III, 96
- identification, III, 26
- map showing location, II, 28
- one of seven generic families, II, 33
- origin of name, VI, 179
- Spanish treachery to, III, 25; VI, 39
- treachery avenged by, VI, 39
- use of term, II, 344; VI, 47
- *See also* Chicora Indians.

Chiefs, Algonquin title for, VI, 96
- authority, I, 194; II, 182–183
- conventions held with, VI, 421
- Creek, list of, IV, 579–580
- discussion of office, I, 194; IV, 480–482
- dwellings, II, 83
  - on mounds, IV, 124–125
- government, I, 267
- heredity in office, II, 194; IV, 480–481
- Indian terms for, IV, 480–481
- Iroquois, descent, v, 73
- noted Ojibwa, sketches of, II, 160–167
- office, among Comanches, I, 231; II, 130
  - among Iroquois, III, 195
  - among Sioux, II, 182
- part taken in war, IV, 62
- poverty, distinguished by, IV, 69
- selection among the Creeks, I, 275, 276
- succession in office, II, 184
- Yankton, costume, III, 67
- *See also* Chieftainship; Cacique; Mico; Sachem; Sagamore; War chief.

Chieftainship, descent in female line, V, 528; VI, 281
  hereditary among Clear Lake Indians, III, 112
  Natchez, succession to, VI, 627
  succession, VI, 281, 385, 386
  See also Chiefs.
Chigantalgi (Chigantualgas), name for the Natchez, V, 99; VI, 31, 197, 626
  sun worship of, IV, 148
  territory occupied by, IV, 148
  See also Quigalta.
Chigantualgas. *See* Chigantalgi.
Chihalis. *See* Chehalis.
Chihalis River, tribes on, VI, 703
Chilcat Indians, census, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Child, derivation of name for, II, 63
  Indian word for, II, 50, 63
  See also Children.
Child bearing, years of, III, 238
Childbirth, among the Chippewyans, V, 175–176
  customs concerning, I, 252, 255, 261, 274; II, 181; III, 239; V, 271, 655
  ease in, II, 65; V, 182
  plant used to facilitate, IV, 515
  power invoked in, V, 440
  recuperative power in, IV, 350
  See also Obstetrics; Reproduction.
Children, affection for, II, 49, 65; IV, 48
  affection of, for parents, IV, 48
  average number in family, III, 614; VI, 562
  care and training, II, 181; III, 214, 240–241, V, 273
  grief at death of, II, 67
  Indian term for, II, 63
  instruction, II, 50–51; IV, 61
  method of carrying, II, 181
  nakedness, V, 275
  orphan, care of, II, 194; IV, 56, 57
  part taken by, in dances, IV, 64
  punishment, V, 273–274
  song to firefly, V, 564
  stealing practiced by, II, 191
  training, in religious rites, IV, 640
  treatment of, Kenisteno, V, 166
  See also Cradles; Family life; Head deformation; Infanticide; Naming customs; Puberty customs; Twins.
Chillates, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
  See also Chehalis.
Chillicothe, battle at, with Shawnees, VI, 307
  center of Indian power, VI, 300
  earthworks at, mention of, VI, 597
Chillicothe, Upper, formerly Plugge's Town, IV, 632
Chilluckittequaw (Chillukkitequaw), location, III, 570
  population, III, 570, 609; V, 706
Chiltz nation, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
  See also Chehalis.
Chilula. *See* Bald Hill Indians.
Chimakum (Chin-a-kums), enslaved by Sklal-lums, IV, 600
  language, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598; V, 703; VI, 703
  population, IV, 598; V, 491, 703; VI, 703
Chimmesyan. *See* Chimsyans.
Chimnahpan (Chimnahpum, Chinnahpum), location, III, 570
  population, III, 570, 609; V, 706
Chimook language, reference to, III, 224
Chimsyan language, tribes speaking, V, 487
Chimsyans, V, 487
  census, V, 487
  Indian names for tribes, V, 487
  location, V, 487
  remarks on, V, 487
Chin nation, V, 173
Chin-a-kum. *See* Chimakum.
Chinatos, location, III, 533
Chinese, funeral ceremony of, V, 80
  knowledge of anatomy, IV, 506–507
  writing, discussion of, I, 422
Chinese element, seen in ruins of Uxmal, V, 106
Chinese Museum, London, reference to, I, 70
Chingwalk (Chingwauk), Algonquin chief, sketch of, I, 112
  inscription interpreted by, I, 107, 112; V, 64; VI, 609, 629
Chingwauk. *See* Chingwalk.
Chinnahpum. *See* Chimnahpan.
Chinookan Family. *See* Tshinook.

Chinook jargon, vocabulary of, V, 548–551
  language. *See* Chimook language.
Chinnooks. *See* Chinooks.
Chinooks (Chenook, Chenouks, Chinnooks), V, 492, 703; VI, 686, 703
  burials, II, 71; V, 655, VI, 617
  classification, III, 402
  color, II, 321
  cranial capacity, V, 244; VI, 574
    measurements, II, 335
  embalming practiced by, V, 693
  head flattening among, II, 326, 328
  illustration of burial, VI, 617
  location, III, 201, 571; IV, 599
    maps showing, III, 96, 200
  Oregon tribe, V, 572
  population, I, 521; III, 201, 571, 609, 632; V, 492, 703, 705; VI, 686, 701
  resemblance to Japanese, I, 217
    to Shoshonee, I, 217
  slaves buried with dead by, II, 71
  skull of, illustrated, II, 318, 320, 322
  See also Chinooks, Lower; Chinooks, Upper.
Chinooks, Lower, V, 490, 703
  location, V, 490, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 490, 703; VI, 703
Chinooks, Upper, V, 490; VI, 700
  location, V, 490, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 490; VI, 703
Chipeways. *See* Chippewas.
Chipewyan. *See* Chippewyans.
Chippawees. *See* Chippewas.
Chippequddic, I, 287.
Chippewa language, IV, 531–538; V, 297–299
  address in, with translation, V, 603
  Algonquin dialect, II, 341
  characteristic feature, III, 523
  compared with Hebrew, IV, 386–387
  conjugation of verb in, V, 299–388
  lexicon [through "A"], V, 565–569
  list of works in, IV, 531–538
  Lord's Prayer in, V, 592
  principles, data respecting, V, 601–620
    grammatical, IV, 385–396, V, 565–569
  vocabulary, V, 556–557, 620
    numerals, II, 216–218
  word "God" declined in, V, 416
Chippewa language—Continued
  See also Ojibwa language.
Chippewa songs, V, 559–564
  corn husking, V, 563–564
  love, V, 559–562
  medicine, V, 563
  war, V, 562
Chippewa tales, of little Monedo, III, 318–320
  of Shingebiss, III, 324–326
Chippewa territory, artifacts from, I, 68
  exploring expedition to, V, 151–152
  rich soil of, I, 182
Chippewas (Chepewas, Chipeways, Chippawees, Chippeways, Chipwas), III, 277, 556; VI, 237, 375, 488, 686
  agency established among, VI, 397
  alliance formed against, I, 304
  allies of the Manatoulines, VI, 203
  American policy toward, VI, 399–400
  ancient seat of, VI, 385
  and others, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
    emigration, III, 610
    hunting grounds, VI, 714
    payments to, VI, 721, 722, 723
    population, VI, 714
  and Ottawas, at missions, V, 698
    dwelling grounds, VI, 714
    fiscal statistics on, VI, 720, 721
    hunting grounds, VI, 714
    trading posts for, III, 599–600
  and Saginaw, population of, VI, 692
  and Sioux, hostilities between, V, 524–525
  annuities, II, 586, 588
  appropriation for, II, 564
  armistice granted to, VI, 364
  as allies of the British, VI, 462
  as allies of the French, VI, 462
  at Braddock's defeat, VI, 217
  at treaty with Bradstreet, VI, 255
  attitude in Revolutionary War, VI, 278
  bands or divisions, I, 458, 468
  belief concerning the soul, V, 79
  Black River, compensation to, V, 456
  Black River, fiscal statistics on, VI, 721, 723
  Boisfort and Red Lake, population, VI, 707

Chippewas—Continued
  brief account of, ii, 560, v, 574
  burial customs, v, 64; vi, 664–665
  census, i, 458–477; iii, 621–628
  characteristics, v, 150, 152
  classification and origin, v, 143
  concentration, proposed, iv, 464
  condition, general, iv, 467
  conference with, v, 667
  country occupied by, i, 183, 458; iii, 559, 584, 591; iv, 187; v, 495; vi, 33, 203, 275, 384, 385, 704, 705
  cranial capacity, v, 244
    measurements, ii, 335
  creation myth, v, 148–149
  custom, v, 71
  decline, ii, 98
  delegation, to U. S. Government, i, 414–420
  dental pictography, vi, 631
  descent of ruling power among, vi, 385
  Detroit, census, i, 458–467
  distinctive moccasin, iii, 66
  division, v, 435
  dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  eastern, classification, iii, 410
  enmity, toward Sioux, ii, 547
  feuds with Sioux, reference to, i, 142, 143
  fire worship among, v, 67
  funds required for, ii, 566–567, 570–571
  Grand Traverse, creation myth of, v, 192
  grave, illustrated, v, 64
  great warpath of, i, 304
  history, general, v, 142–152
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
  identified as old Algonquins, v, 146
  influence exercised by, vi, 463
  inscriptions left by, i, 304
  investments for, ii, 561, 562, 563
  lands, iv, 572
    ceded by, ii, 602, 603; iv, 188; vi, 393–395, 464, 483–484, 505
    claimed by, iii, 584
    purchased from, ii, 593, 595, 598, 599, 600, 601
    statistics on, 605, 606
  language spoken by, iii, 563
    reference to, iii, 96

Chippewas—Continued
  leading men, iii, 569
  league, with other tribes, vi, 485
  legends, ii, 229–234
  listed as a linguistic stock, iii, 591–593
  lodges, iv, 57
  map showing location, iii, 96
  medical practices, vi, 632
  members of Pontiac's Confederacy, ii, 307
  migration, period of, v, 39
    trend of, v, 184, 185
  Mississippi, information concerning source, i, 143
    population, vi, 707
    statistics on, vi, 721, 723
  name, derivation of, ii, 358; iv, 187; v, 142; vi, 483
    given to rice, i, 187
  numeral system, v, 244
  of Chippewa Valley, census, i, 468–477
  of Detroit, location, iv, 461
  of Grand Traverse Bay, census, i, 458–467
  of Grand Traverse Bay, population, iii, 523, 524
  of Lake Superior, census, i, 468–477
  of Lake Superior, fiscal statistics on, vi, 721, 723
  of Lake Superior, lands occupied by, iv, 463–464
  of Lake Superior, population, vi, 692, 707
  of Michillimackinac, census, i, 458–467
  of Rainy Lake, census, i, 468–477
  of Saginaw, fiscal statistics on, vi, 721, 723
  of Saginaw, lands ceded by, vi, 484
  of Saginaw, treaty with, vi, 383
  of St. Croix Valley, census, i, 468–477
  of Swan Creek and Black River, census, i, 458–467
  of Thunder Bay, census, i, 458–467
  of Upper Mississippi, census, i, 468–477
  one of Seven Fires, ii, 169
  opposition, to schools, iv, 478

- Chippewas—Continued
  - origin, classification and, v, 143
    - tradition, v, 148–149
  - other names for, v, 41
  - peace negotiations of, with Sioux, i, 338
  - peace sought by, vi, 343
  - performance of Midawin by, v, 428–433, 434
  - petition to the President, i, 414–420
  - picture writing among, i, 338
  - Pontiac joined by, vi, 243
  - population, i, 458, 468, 523, 524; iii, 523, 524, 563, 581, 584, 591; iv, 572, 609; v, 495, 708; vi, 271, 272, 275, 276, 686, 689, 692, 693, 704, 705, 707, 714
  - recommendations concerning, ii, 549–550
  - regard for the French, v, 147
  - relations with other tribes, iii, 278, 567; v, 524–525
  - removal, v, 495; vi, 497, 505–506, 516
    - problem of, iv, 485
  - report on condition, vi, 547
  - resemblance to Ottowas, iv, 187; vi, 464
  - scaffold burial adopted by, vi, 617
  - Sioux, enmity toward, ii, 547
    - feuds with, i, 142, 143
    - wars with, v, 524–525; vi, 387–389
  - spirit-god of, iii, 483–484
  - stature, iv, 349
  - suitable place for, iv, 193–194
  - Swan Creek, fiscal statistics on, vi, 721, 722, 723
  - Swan Creek and Black River, population, vi, 689, 692
  - synonyms, iii, 563
  - totems, iii, 556
  - trade, iii, 565
  - trading posts for, iii, 567, 599–600
  - traditional enemies, v, 39
  - traditions, i, 302–304; iii, 491–492; v, 147–150
  - treaties with, v, 499, 500; vi, 327, 330, 334, 380, 421
    - effecting removal of, vi, 488
    - ceding lands of, vi, 458
    - settling boundary for, vi, 422
- Chippewas—Continued
  - war customs, ii, 58
  - warriors, number of, iii, 556, 559, 560, 563; vi, 271
  - wars with the Sioux, vi, 387–389
  - winter headdress, illustrated, iii, 68
  - *See also* Ojibwas; Ontonagons; Pillagers; Saulteurs.
- Chippeways. *See* Chippewas.
- Chippewyans (Chepeweyans, Chepewyans, Cheppewyans, Cheppeyans), an Athapascan tribe, iii, 542
  - beard, ii, 322
  - beliefs, v, 173–174
  - characteristics, v, 174
  - classification, iii, 401
  - creation myth, v, 173
  - dress, v, 174–175
  - hair, ii, 322
  - language, v, 172
  - name, double use of, v, 574
    - native, v, 172
    - origin, v, 172
  - population, ii, 27; v, 172
  - territory occupied by, v, 172
  - tradition, i, 19
- Chipwas. *See* Chippewas.
- Chisca village, artificial mound at, iv, 124
  - attack on, by De Soto, iii, 47; vi, 62
- Chisels, copper, i, 94
  - stone, i, 91–92
    - illustrated, i, 77, 90
- Chitimacha. *See* Chetimaches.
- Choate, Lucy, illustration of hair, iii, 390
  - measurements of hair, iii, 384
- Chock o lock o, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
- Chockreletan (Chocreleatan), census, v, 492
  - location, vi, 702
  - population, vi, 702
- Chocta. *See* Choctaw.
- Chocta, Muskhog, a linguistic family, iii, 401
  - divisions, iii, 401
- Choctas. *See* Choctaws.
- Choctaw lands, boundaries, vi, 527

Choctaw language, III, 596–597
  books and tracts in, IV, 544–546
  brief vocabulary, III, 347
  Lord's Prayer in, V, 592
  vocabulary (numerals), II, 204–206
Choctaws (Chactas, Chactaws, Chauctaws, Chocta, Choctas), V, 99; VI, 430, 686
  account of, V, 572
  agriculture practiced by, VI, 526
  allies of the French, VI, 237
  and Chickasaws, acres possessed by, IV, 519
    relation, VI, 460, 484, 527, 528
    treaty with, VI, 484
    union of, IV, 472, 574; VI, 46
  annuities, II, 585
  Appalachian tribe, III, 29
  appropriations for, II, 564
  at battle of Mauvila, III, 44
  attendance at mission, V, 698
  attitude in Creek war, VI, 369
  called Mavilians, II, 34
    Mobilians, III, 29
  Catawba band absorbed by, III, 293
  census, V, 504–505; VI, 690
    roll, abstract of, IV, 528
  classification, III, 401; V, 42
  colonization, plan for, VI, 412
  condition, after removal, VI, 480, 522–528
    general, V, 483
    report on, IV, 582–587
  country allotted to, VI, 410
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  De Soto in country of, II, 34
  emigration, VI, 488
  forts erected by, V, 110
  funds required for, II, 567
  government, V, 504; VI, 528
  group including, I, 197
  head flattening among, II, 324
  intermarriage with Scotch, VI, 351
  investments for, II, 563
  lands, IV, 574
    ceded by, II, 602
    claimed by, III, 584, 585
    purchased from, II, 594, 598, 599
    statistics on, II, 605
  language, discussion of, III, 596–597
Choctaws—Continued
  legal name proposed for, V, 498
  location, III, 559, 584, 585, 597; VI, 704
  map showing colony, IV, 180
  maps showing location, III, 96; V, 253; VI, 519
  medical practices, V, 440–441
  migration legend, V, 98; VI, 403
  missionary work among, V, 698; VI, 734, 738, 739, 740
  nearly identical with Chicasa, III, 401
  neutrality in Creek war, VI, 403
  numeral system, V, 244, 712
  origin tradition, V, 61
  population, I, 522, 523; III, 584, 585, 597, 609, 610; IV, 574; V, 483, 498; VI, 272, 479, 686, 704
  progress, V, 506, 694
  relations with Whites, V, 278
  removal, II, 558; IV, 460, 484–485; VI, 497, 516
    agreement to, VI, 433, 436
    condition after, VI, 480, 522–528
    plan for, III, 576, 578
    policy during, VI, 476
  school planned for, V, 699
  settlement in country of, VI, 185
  slavery among, VI, 332
  stand taken in Revolutionary War, VI, 295
  statistics, attempt to gather, V, 482
    fiscal, VI, 720, 722, 723
    on land of, II, 605
  stature, II, 318; IV, 349
  sun worship practiced by, V, 103
  supreme deity of, III, 511
  territory occupied by, VI, 32
  traditional home, IV, 606
  transference to the West, VI, 423
  treaties with, V, 499; VI, 328, 334, 380, 461
    provisions of, VI, 403
  voluntary removal of, V, 450
  warriors, estimate of, III, 555, 559
  westward movement, VI, 420
  within Neosho Colony, IV, 460
Cho gart lo fixico, of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Choiteu, a California tribe, VI, 711
Chokuyem. *See* Tcho-ko-yem.
Cholera, epidemic of, I, 184

Cholula, measurements of pyramid of, vi, 582
Cholulans, iii, 515
  mythology, vi, 640-641
Cholulu monuments, conclusions drawn from, iv, 114
Chopemnish. *See* Chopunnish.
Chopko, Jonny, chief at Chehawah, iv, 580
Chopunnish (Chopemnish) Indians, beard of, ii, 322
  location, iii, 570
  population, iii, 570, 609; v, 706
    of Lewis's River, iii, 570
  See also Nez Perces.
Chori, name for Indians of Trinidad, Calif., iii, 133
Cho-tan-o-man-as, arrangements made for, at Clear Lake, iii, 110
Choteau, M., St. Louis merchant, iii, 354, 355
Chouteau, Col. Pierre, death of Pontiac described by, ii, 308
Chowan River, exploration of, vi, 90
  Indians on, vi, 86
  Indian villages on, vi, 85
Chowanoc. *See* Chowanocks.
Chowanocks (Chowans), discussion of name of, vi, 90
  included in Monacan dialects, iii, 292
  location, vi, 86
  of Iroquois stock, vi, 86
Chowans. *See* Chowanocks.
Chowechak (Chow-e-shak), a California tribe or band, iii, 116; vi, 711
  location, iii, 421
Chow-e-shak. *See* Chowechak.
Chow-e-shak language, vocabulary, iii, 434–440
Christian churches, Indian membership in, v, 698
Christian Indians, attitude of, during Revolutionary War, vi, 277
  census, i, 488–497; iii, 621–628
  condition, after removal, vi, 543, 544
  funds required for, ii, 566
  government, v, 504
  location, i, 488; vi, 705
  meeting place, v, 225
  migrations, vi, 317
  Neuters at village of, iv, 208
Christian Indians—Continued
  payments made to, vi, 721, 723
  population, v, 504; vi, 705
  tribes composing, v, 506
  See also Munceys and Christian Indians.
Christian religion, importance of, in civilizing Indians, iii, 472–474
Christianity, among Indians, table showing, v, 502–503
  among Oneidas, v, 512–513
  among Oregon tribes, iii, 221–222
  Chippewa attitude toward, v, 151
  forced on Indians, iii, 23
  Indian attitude toward, iv, 638–639; vi, 105
  list of tribes adopting, v, 504
  opposition to, iv, 640
Christiantown, i, 287
Christinaux. *See* Cristeneaux.
Chu-cha-cas language, Pueblos speaking, v, 689
Chugnut. *See* Chaghnet.
Chunk yard (Chunkey-yard), described by Bartram, v, 100
  use of, v, 265; vi, 343
Church, Capt. Benjamin, vi, 155, 163
  campaign of, against Indians, vi, 171
Church Missionary Society, mission established by, vi, 739
Church of the United Brethren, missionary labors of, vi, 734, 735
Churchill River, classification of language of, iii, 401
  tribes on, vi, 33
Chusco, an Ottowa prophet, i, 389
  information obtained from, i, 307, 308; vi, 203
  miraculous arts of, iv, 491
Chute, J. A., work of, iv, 541
Cia (Chia), identification, iv, 35, 39
  other names for, iv, 35
  party sent to, iv, 29
  population, iii, 633; vi, 709
  See also Silla.
Cibola, v, 107
  Coronado at, iv, 24; vi, 70
  identified as old Zuñi, iv, 24, 32, 33, 39
  map showing location of, iv, 39

Cibola—Continued
  tale of seven cities of, IV, 22; VI, 58
  use of name, IV, 25
Cibolos, absorbed by Umahs, I, 519
  ancient, population, I, 519
Cicoua, a synonym of Cicuyé (q. v.), IV, 39
Cicuyé, V, 107
  arrival of Spaniards at, IV, 26
  Coronado at, IV, 29
  description, IV, 35
  identified as Pecos, IV, 32, 35, 39
  location, IV, 25–26, 29, 39
    map showing, IV, 39
  Pecos name for, IV, 35
  sketch of, IV, 29
  Spanish expedition at, IV, 34
Cieza, Pedro de, observations made by, II, 328
Cincinnati, fort on present site of, VI, 336
Cinnabar, mines of, I, 150
  ore identified as, I, 150
  use of word, I, 150
Cinteotl, Toltec goddess, VI, 631
Cipriano, Father, labors of, IV, 557
Circleville, mention of earthworks at, VI, 597
Circumcision, cases of among Indians, III, 268
Civility, interpreter, mention of, VI, 140
Civilization, and geographic location, IV, 662
  diseases traceable to, IV, 503–504
  effect on Indians, V, 44–45
  European, Indian attitude toward, VI, 27–29
  Indian resistance to, VI, 565–566
  influence on Indian discussed, III, 220, 614
  judged by antiquities, IV, 113–114
  Mexican, discovery of, IV, 122–123
  state of, in Peru and Mexico, at Discovery, V, 89–95
  See also Indian Civilization.
Civilization, Indian, at time of Discovery, I, 55
  backward state of, II, 30–31
  character, V, 29
  conclusions concerning, I, 105
  decline, V, 69
  degree, I, 45
Civilization—Continued
  discussion of, I, 62–65, 71–72; VI, 346–348, 507–509, 592–594
  disintegration, IV, 148
  effect of agriculture on, V, 392
  effect of commerce with Whites on, II, 188–189
  exaggerated reports of, V, 88
  extent, IV, 665–666
  intrusive elements in, V, 85–86
  lack of advance in, IV, 146–147
  plans for, discussed, II, 526–537
  stages, I, 224
  Toltec element in, IV, 147–148
  See also Culture.
Civilized Indians, Pueblos called, I, 245
Cla-catska, a Creek town, IV, 563
Clackamas (Clarkamus), VI, 686
  location, III, 572; V, 492
    maps showing, III, 96, 200
  population, I, 521; III, 572, 609, 632; V, 492; VI, 686, 701
Clackstar nation, location, III, 570
  population, III, 570
  See also Tlatskanai.
Clahclellah, a Shahalah tribe, III, 570
  location, III, 570
Clahnaquah. *See* Clannahqueh.
Clahoose. *See* Cle Huse.
Claiborne, Gen., attack by, on Creek town, VI, 368
  fort defended by, VI, 362
Clallams, population, V, 705
  See also Noosclalum; S'klallams; Tlalams.
Clal lu e is, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census, V, 488
Clamets, classification, III, 402
  See also Klamath Indians.
Clamoctomichs, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
Clan. *See* Clans.
Claninnates, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
Clannahqueh, location, III, 570
  population, III, 570
Clannarminnamuns, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571

- Clans, totemic organizations, i, 193
  - Dacota, discussion of, ii, 171
  - explanation of term, i, 193; v, 262
  - feuds between, ii, 171
  - of the Chickasaw, i, 311
  - of the Iowas, iii, 268–269
  - of the Winnebagoes, iv, 236
  - system, among the Creeks, i, 275
- Clark, Gen., Indian population estimated by, v, 480, 484
  - treaty negotiated by, vi, 420, 421–422
- Clark(e), Gen. George Rogers, iv, 623; vi, 263
  - cited on mound period, vi, 600
  - expedition, against the Indians, vi, 302–303
  - testimony, regarding Logan massacre, iii, 56
  - theory, concerning mounds, iv, 133–136
  - treaty concluded by, vi, 327
- Clark, Gen. William, explorations of, vi, 349
  - position filled by, vi, 350
  - quoted on removal of Indians, vi, 426–427
  - services rendered by, vi, 405
  - standing, among the Indians, vi, 380
- Clark, Wm., and Cass, Lew., papers transmitted by, iii, 588–589
- Clarkamus. *See* Clackamas.
- Clarke, Edward Daniel, inscription copied by, vi, 611
- Clarke, Gen. William, iii, 248
- Clarke, Maj., death of, vi, 336
- Clarkson, Matthew, diary of journey, iv, 265–278
  - trading station opened by, vi, 269
- Clary, Lt. R., expedition escorted by, i, 144
- Classification of tribes, vi, 573–574
  - by early French, vi, 391
  - *See also* under tribal names.
- Clatacamin (Clatsacamin, Clatsaconin), vi, 686
  - population, i, 521; vi, 686, 701
  - *See also* Tlatskannai.
- Clath lo hargo, a Creek chief, iv, 576
- Clatsaps. *See* Clatsops.
- Clatsop (Klatsop) language, brief vocabulary, iii, 223–224
- Clatsops (Chatsops, Clatsaps, Klatsops), v, 492; vi, 686
  - classification, iii, 402
  - head flattening among, ii, 326
  - location, iii, 201, 571; v, 492
  - map showing location, iii, 200
  - physical characteristics, iii, 224
  - population, i, 521; iii, 201, 571, 609, 632; v, 492; vi, 686, 701
- Clay, Gen. Green, defeat of troops under, vi, 362
- Clay, Henry, illustration showing hair of, iii, 388
- Clear Lake country, described, iii, 108–109
  - population, vi, 711
- Clear Lake Indians, affinities, iii, 108, 421
  - beliefs and customs, iii, 112–113
  - description, iii, 106–108
  - population, iii, 110, 634
- Clear Lake treaty, tribes represented at, iii, 109
- Cle Huse, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  - census, v, 488
- Cle li Kitte, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  - census, v, 488
- Clemens, James W., mound contents described by, i, 122
- Clemma (John), chief of the Nasomah, vi, 702
- Clermont's Band, vi, 540
  - an Osage band, iii, 594
  - country occupied by, iii, 594
- Cleuwatha Town, a Creek town, iv, 575
  - chiefs of, iv, 575
- Clewauleys, a Creek town, v, 262
- Cle wulla, an Upper Creek town, iv 578
- Clickass. *See* Clict ass.
- Clickatais. *See* Clickatats.
- Clickatats (Clickatais, Clickitats), account of, iv, 600
  - head flattening among, ii, 326
  - maps showing location, iii, 96, 200
  - population, i, 521; iii, 632; iv, 701
- Clickitats. *See* Clickatats.
- Clict ass, census, v, 489
  - language, v, 489

Clinch, Gen., defeat of, at the Wythlacooche, VI, 471
  part taken by, in Seminole War, VI, 468, 469, 470
Clinton, De Witt, III, 184, 198; IV, 131
  cited on ancient warfare, IV, 137
  quoted on Iroquois mentality, III, 57
Clinton, Gen. James, VI, 306
  Indian town destroyed by, VI, 311
  march of, VI, 309
  observations made by, VI, 334
Clinton, Gov., V, 514
Clishhooks (Cushhooks), location, III, 572
  population of, III, 572, 609
Cloo, census, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Clossets, location, IV, 599
  See also Ma-caw.
Clothing, affected by environment, V, 80
  Clear Lake Indians, III, 108
  decoration, II, 64, 515; V, 116
  description, III, 65–69
  made of skins, I, 87–88
  of a corpse, IV, 54, 66
  of Apaches, V, 210–211
  of Blackfeet, V, 182
  of California Indians, III, 127, 140, 141
  of California tribes, illustrated, V, 217
  of Callapuyas, III, 219
  of Chippewyans, V, 174–175
  of Comanches, II, 133
  of Creek women, V, 275
  of Cuchans, I, 112–113
  of Dacotahs, IV, 68–69
  of Kenistenos, V, 165–166
  of Massachusetts Indians, I, 284
  of Moquis, III, 298
  of Ojibwas, II, 138
  of Oregon Indians, III, 219–220
  of Pueblos, IV, 76–77
  of Sacramento tribes, VI, 710
  of the dead, II, 68; IV, 54, 66
  of Virginia Indians, II, 23
  of Winnebagoes, IV, 58
  of Yumas, II, 110
  See also Blankets; Costume; Moccasins; Ornamentation.
Clouds, importance of, to Indian mind, I, 34
Clow et sus, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census, V, 488
Clowns, at Moqui dance, IV, 84
Clowwewalla. *See* Tum Waters.
Coacquannok, Delaware village, now Philadelphia, IV, 280
Coal, bituminous, in Rocky Mountain region, I, 209, 218
  found on Arkansas River, I, 270
Coasawda, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Coat of mail, wooden, described, III, 216
  illustrated, III, 216
Coatl, a type of evil, IV, 664
Cochecalechee, meaning of name, V, 575
Cochiti (Cochite), language, V, 689
  population, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 709
Cocknawaga, Peter, VI, 262
Coco Maricopas. *See* Maricopas.
Co-co-noon Indians, manner of speech, IV, 407
  vocabulary, IV, 413
Cocopa. *See* Co-co-pah.
Co-co-pah (Cacupas, Cu-cu-pahs, Cucupas), a Yuma division, II, 116
  country occupied by, II, 116
  description, IV, 38
  maps showing location, III, 96; IV, 24
Codex Tellurianus, I, 21
Codex Vaticanus, I, 21
Coeur d'Alene (Cour d'Alenes, Cour d'Aliens), location, V, 490
  population, III, 632; V, 490, 705, 707; VI, 700, 701
  See also Conerd Helene; Skitswish.
Cofaqui, De Soto at, III, 40
Cofatchequi (Cofatchique, Cofitchiqui, Cutifachiqui), II, 35
  De Soto at, II, 34; III, 27, 40; VI, 61
  site, II, 88
Coffee, Gen. John, Creeks defeated by, VI, 367, 370
Cofitchiqui. *See* Cofatchequi.
Coghnawagas and others, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  population, VI, 714
  See also Caughnawaga.

Cognawagoes and Connefedagoes, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  population, VI, 714
  See also Caughnawaga.
Cohahatatea (Cohahatea), Indian name of Hudson River, VI, 100, 504
Coharty, Mr., VI, 239
Cohocton, meaning of name, IV, 384; V, 669
Colbert, Maj. Pitman, IV, 583
Colbert, Wm., annuity of, II, 584
Colbert, Winchester, Chickasaw division of, I, 508
Colcord, Edward, V, 228
Colden, Cadwallader, cited on Iroquois attainments, V, 107
  Five Nations described by, III, 184–195
  quoted on Indian oratory, III, 56
Colespelin. *See* Calapelins.
Coligni (Coligny), Admiral, expedition organized by, VI, 73, 76
  settlement of Florida by, VI, 744
Coligoa, location, IV, 132
  northern point reached by De Soto, III, 50
  search for, by De Soto, IV, 320, 321
Collville tribe. *See* Colville.
Collyer, Col., II, 114
Coloille Indians, population, I, 521
Colonial Commissioners, addressed by Cannassatego, III, 199
Colonies possibly absorbed by Indians, V, 86
Colonization of tribes, IV, 180, 459–475
  authorized by Congress, V, 428–431
  territory assigned for, IV, 460
  See also Colonization plan.
Colonization plan, IV, 484–486; VI, 406–416
  first decade, VI, 428–461
    end of, VI, 503
  fundamental principles, VI, 444
Colonized tribes, description of lands, VI, 519–521
  geographical position, VI, 519, 520
Color, as a racial characteristic, IV, 362
  of Indian tribes, IV, 361, 362
Colorado Cañon, discovery, by Spanish expedition, IV, 25
Colorado of the West, branches of, described, I, 218
Colorado River, changes in name, V, 200
  Indians of, V, 197; VI, 698
  Yuma name for, II, 113
Colorado Valley, inhabitants, I, 217–218
Columbia, use of name, V, 594
Columbia River, tribes on, VI, 703
Columbia River Indians, cranial measurements, II, 335
  skull of, illustrated, II, 326, 328, 330
Columbia Valley, Indian population, III, 570–572
  tribes occupying, III, 570–572
Columbus, discoveries of, VI, 743
  Indians named by, V, 28
  landing place of, IV, 554
  visit to Iceland, I, 106
Colville (Collville tribe) and Spokane, population of, V, 706, 707
  location, V, 490
  population, III, 632; V, 490, 705, 707; VI, 700, 701
  See also Kettle Falls Indians; Schwo-Yelpi; Shuyelpe; Wheelpo.
Comanche (Comanchee) language, brief vocabulary, II, 129–130
  conclusions derived from, III, 403
  vocabulary, II, 494–505
Comanchees. *See* Comanches.
Comanches (Camanches, Comanchees, Cumanches), III, 399; IV, 469, 470; VI, 34, 489, 686, 708
  and Kioways, location, VI, 705
    population, VI, 705
  attack on emigrants, II, 134
    illustrated, II, 133
  attacks on Pecos, IV, 35
  bands, names of, I, 230, 260
  beliefs, II, 126–127, 128, 129
  branch of the Shoshonee, I, 201
  brief account, I, 244; V, 575–576
  Chiefs, list of, II, 128
  classification, II, 343; IV, 551; V, 197, 217
  country inhabited by, I, 230; III, 635
    described, I, 238–239; II, 128–129
  depredations, IV, 593
  description, I, 229–238; II, 125–134
  divisions, II, 127–128; V, 575
  identified as Shoshonean, II, 38

- Comanches—Continued
  - included in Shoshonee group, i, 197
  - inscription of, described, iv, 253
    - illustrated, iv, 253; vi, 70
  - intermarriage with other tribes, ii, 126
  - lack of tradition among, i, 231
  - linguistic affiliations, i, 260; iii, 402, 403
  - map showing location, iii, 96
  - marriage customs, v, 683
  - migration, vi, 616
    - legend, ii, 126
  - names for, various, ii, 126
  - numeral system, v, 244
  - origin tradition, i, 230; v, 683
  - physical characteristics, v, 684
  - population, i, 230, 244, 245, 260, 518, 519; iii, 609, 635; v, 702; vi, 686, 705, 708
  - raids, into Mexico, ii, 330, 334
  - range of war parties, i, 159
  - religion, v, 684–685
  - report on, ii, 125–134
  - Teyans identified as, iv, 35
  - treaty with, vi, 461
  - *See also* Naüni; Niuna; Padoucah; Pandouca stock.
- Combahee Indians, gold and silver obtained from, iv, 165
  - treachery avenged by, iii, 39
- Combahee River, Indians of, iii, 25; vi, 32, 39
- Combs, wooden, illustrated, iii, 468
- Com-comly, iii, 144
- Comenistequoia, vi, 269
- Comeya. *See* Co-mo-ya.
- Commerce. *See* Trade.
- Commissioner of Indian Affairs, report for 1850, ii, 547–560
- Committee on Indian Affairs, address to Indians by, vi, 293–296
- Communication, between hostile tribes, iii, 212
  - by "signal" trees, iii, 150–151
  - *See also* Inscriptions; Pictographs.
- Comogei, ii, 115
- Co moux, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  - census, v, 488
- Comox. *See* Co moux.
- Co-mo-ya (Co-mo-yahs, Comoyei), ii, 110, 111
  - distinguishing characteristics, ii, 116
  - location, ii, 116
  - words in language, ii, 121
- Comoyei. *See* Co-mo-ya.
- Complexion, of aborigines, ii, 320
  - *See also* Color.
- Compostella, iv, 22, 23, 32
- Cona, inhabited by Teyas, iv, 37
- Con-a-ha-ta-kaw's Band, census, i, 498–507
- Conanicut, vi, 118
- Conastoga. *See* Conestogo.
- Conawaghrunes. *See* Caughnawaga.
- Con chante ti, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
- Conerd Helene or Printed Hearts, population of, i, 521
- Conestoga. *See* Conestogo.
- Conestogo (Canostogas, Conastoga, Conestogoes, Conestogues), an Oneida tribe, vi, 136
  - Andastes identified as, vi, 137, 138
  - called Susquehanna Menquays, vi, 140
  - language, vi, 140, 141
  - massacre, vi, 141, 237
  - subjugated by Iroquois, vi, 140
  - treaties with, vi, 140
  - *See also* Andastes, Minqua, Susquehannocks.
- Conestogoe (Conostoga) village, birthplace of Skenandoah, v, 510
  - Indians at, vi, 141
  - massacre at, vi, 141
- Conestogoes, Conestogues. *See* Conestogo.
- Confederacy, formation of, among Iroquois, i, 197
  - lack of spirit of, among Indians, iv, 482
  - of western tribes, mounds attributed to, iv, 136, 137
  - *See also* Alliances, tribal; Creek Confederacy; Iroquois Confederacy; Powhatan Confederacy.

- Congarees, antiquities of, iv, 155–169, 170–172
  - illustrated, iv, 160, 164–168; vi, 179
  - conspiracy entered by, iv, 158
  - decrease in population, iv, 158
  - described by Lawson, iv, 157–158
  - disappearance, iv, 159
  - skull, illustrated, iv, 160
    - type of, iv, 172
  - subordinate tribe of the Catawbas, vi, 179
- Congo Billy, hair, measurements of, iii, 383
  - illustration of, iii, 390
- Coniatare, Iroquois name for Lake Huron, iv, 383
- Conies, v, 137
  - *See also* Conoy.
- Connassatego. *See* Canassatego.
- Connecticut, Indian lands in, iii, 583, 586; v, 480
  - Indian population of, i, 524; iii, 583, 586; v, 480
  - population and area of, iv, 610
- Connecticut River, ancient form of name, v, 576
  - Indians on, vi, 110
  - meaning of name, v, 576
- Connecticut Valley, tribes of, v, 226–227
- Connefedagoes and Cognawagoes, dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  - hunting grounds, vi, 714
  - population of, vi, 714
- Conner, Henry, assistance rendered by, i, 113
- Connewangoes, a branch of the Senecas, iii, 288
  - Catawbas driven out by, iii, 288
  - country occupied by, iii, 288
- Conoies. *See* Conoy.
- Conolly, Maj., frontier forces commanded by, iv, 622
- Conoodagtoh, vi, 140
- Conostoga. *See* Conestogoe village.
- Conoy (Conoies, Conoys), a synonym of Nanticos, vi, 131
  - and others, population of, vi, 270
  - country occupied by, v, 668; vi, 131
  - dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  - hunting grounds, vi, 714
  - migration, vi, 132
  - population, v, 668; vi, 714
  - subjection, to Iroquois, iv, 617
- Conoy (Conies, Conoys)—Con.
  - tribe of the Susquehannocks, iv, 617
    - extinct, v, 576
- Constellation, The Bear, recognized by Massachusetts Indians, i, 285
- Consumption, among Eel River Indians, iii, 128, 129
  - treatment for, iv, 512
- Contamis (Contenay), location, i, 437
  - population, i, 521
  - *See also* Kutenai; Flatbows.
- Contenay. *See* Contamis.
- Continence. *See* Warriors.
- Continental abrasion, i, 171
- Cook, Capt., reference to discoveries of, v, 27
- Cooking, baskets used for, i, 61, 211; iii, 107, 206
  - method of, among Snake Indians, i, 211
    - among the Sioux, ii, 176
  - Shoshonean, described, i, 211
  - simplicity of, ii, 64
  - vessels used for, 81
  - *See also* Food; Pottery.
- Cook-koo-oose, location, iii, 571
  - population, iii, 571, 609
- Coolamies, a Creek town, v, 262
- Cools-on-tick-ara, meaning of name, i, 260
- Cooniac. *See* Konic.
- Coon-skin, an Eel River chief, iii, 129
- Cooper, Senator, of Pennsylvania, Indian legislation discussed by, v, 465–466
- Coos. *See* Cookkoo-oose.
- Coosa, principal Creek town, iii, 41
- Coosa fixico of Talladega Town, iv, 576
- Coosa River, derivation of name, iii, 511
  - description, v, 257
  - mounds on, iv, 127
- Coosadas (Coosades, Coosidas), a part of the Creek nation, v, 115, 260
  - classification, iii, 401, 404
  - population, iii, 399
  - *See also* Koasati.
- Coosadas (village), a Creek town, v, 262
- Coosahatchee (Coosahatchie) River, derivation of name, iii, 27
  - Indians of region, vi, 32
- Coosahatches, a Creek town, v, 262

Coosas (Coosaws) Indians, included in Appalachians, v, 42
  subordinate tribe of the Catawbas, vi, 179
Coosas (village), a Creek town, v, 262
Coosaws. *See* Coosas.
Coosidas. *See* Coosadas.
Coospellar, location, iii, 572
  population, iii, 572, 609
  See also Kalispel.
Coosuc. *See* Coosucks.
Coosucks, derivation of name, v, 222
  members of Pennacook Confederacy, v, 222
Cootenays (Coutenay), population, v, 490; vi, 701
  and Flatbows, population, v, 705; vi, 700
  See also Kutenai.
Copafi, inhabitants briefly described, ii, 32
Copalis. *See* Pailsh.
Copeh language, band speaking, iii, 421
  vocabulary, iii, 428–434
Copeland, Mr., quoted on the Choctaws, iv, 586
Copper, artifacts, i, 67, 99; vi, 598
  axes from Peruvian guacas, v, 92
  discovery of mass of, i, 96, 98
  hardened by tin, use of, ii, 31
  implements, description, iv, 438–439
    discovery in Ohio, v, 665–666
    illustrations of, iv, 438; v, 93
    recovery of, v, 112
  mining, i, 95–100
  ornaments, i, 93
  plates of, found with skeletons, i, 127–128
  trade in, i, 67, 99
  use among Ojibwas, ii, 138
    by Indians, i, 50, 67; iii, 87–88; v, 395
    by mound-builders, i, 99
  See also Copper mines.
Copper-mine Indians, v, 179
  Athapascan tribe, iii, 542
  numerical importance, ii, 27
  population, ii, 27
Coppermine River language, classification, iii, 401
Copper mines and mining, aboriginal, iv, 143–144; vi, 611
  ancient, methods used in, v, 111
    remains of, i, 96; v, 395–396, 397
  implements used in, iv, 144
Copper ore of Lake Superior, i, 160
Copway, George, translation by, iv, 532
Coquille bands, origin of name, vi, 702
Coquille River, Indians of, vi, 702
Cordova, Francisco Hernandez de, discoveries of, iii, 27; vi, 44, 743
Corees, identification, vi, 179
  location, vi, 35
Corn (maize, *Zea maize*), a subsidiary food, i, 433
  Algonquin belief concerning, v, 39
  as an element of civilization, i, 64
  as evidence of route of migration, i, 64; ii, 29–32; iv, 115, 132
  buried with the dead, v, 93
  ceremony connected with, v, 267; vi, 385
  connection with pottery, i, 61
  cultivated on Grave Creek flats, iv, 130
  cultivation, i, 46, 56–57, 60, 197; ii, 28–29
    effect, i, 60–65; v, 229
    extent, i, 80; ii, 29; vi, 562
  dance connected with, iii, 89; v, 685
  drink made from, v, 274
  feast of, v, 268
  guarded from birds, iii, 63
  human sacrifice connected with, v, 78
  in Minnesota, i, 182, 183
  Iroquois aided by, ii, 30
  legend concerning waste of, v, 194–195
  legend of origin, i, 311; ii, 230–232; iii, 538; iv, 343; v, 193
  offering to Great Spirit, vi, 385
  on De Soto's line of march, ii, 29
  pounding, illustrated, iv, 175
  preparation for food, i, 80; iii, 466; v, 274
    for warriors, i, 80
  reference to introduction of, i, 145
  song of, Chippewa, v, 563–564
  spread of, iv, 115

Corn (maize, *Zea maize*)—Continued
  supplied to Jamestown colony, II, 29
  tribes cultivating, v, 108; VI, 34, 128
  See also Agriculture; Cornfields; Corn planting; Garden beds.
Corn cracker, illustration of, I, 88
Cornds, Bob, chief of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Cornelius, a Tuolumne chief, IV, 407
Cornfields, protection of, by menstruating women, v, 70
  illustration showing protection of, III, 63; v, 70
Corn House, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Corn Island, erection of fort on, VI, 302
Cornplanter, Chief, at Canandaigua council, VI, 326
  location of band of, III, 288
  peace mission of, v, 668
  Senecas led by, VI, 314
Corn planting, ceremony connected with, VI, 627
  marked by human sacrifice, IV, 50; VI, 496
Cornstalk, Chief, IV, 614, 626
  battle led by, VI, 266
Cornwallis, Capt., VI, 143
Coroados of Brazil, stature of, II, 318
Coronado, Francisco Vasquez, country covered by, IV, 30
  discussion of route of, IV, 32–40
  expedition of, III, 308–309; IV, 23–32; VI, 69–71, 743
    failure, IV, 31
    limits reached by, v, 107
  natives robbed by, IV, 27
  route, IV, 32–40
    map of, IV, 39
  sheep introduced by, VI, 616
Cortereals, I, 134
Cortez, III, 23
  at Lake Tezcoco, v, 96
  conquests, III, 27; IV, 21–22
  exaggeration attributed to, I, 46
  Mexico invaded by, VI, 743
  Narvaez defeated by, III, 28
  reference to invasion by, v, 62
Cosa, a synonym of Coosa (q. v.), II, 34
Coshattas (Coshattees, Coshatties), III, 524
  country occupied by, III, 585, 599
  population, III, 585, 596
  See also Koasati.
Coshattees, Coshatties. *See* Coshattas.
Cosmogony, Iroquoian, VI, 666–670
  See also Creation myths.
Cosninas, map showing location, III, 96; IV, 24
Costanoes, disappearance, VI, 710
  vocabulary of language, II, 494–505
    notes to, II, 506
Costumes, Comanche, I, 234
  for dances, IV, 74, 77
    illustrated, III, 217
  for Giant's dance, III, 487
  Moqui dancers', described, IV, 83–84
    illustrated, IV, 74
  of California Indians, v, 649
  of California warriors, III, 216
  of Chippewa woman, illustrated, v, 147
  of Comanche warrior, I, 235
  of Dacotah warriors, IV, 63
  of Pueblo dancers, IV, 79
  of Winnebago warriors, IV, 53–54
  of Yankton chief, described, III, 67
  See also Clothing; Hairdressing; Headdress; Ornaments.
Cosulhentan (Cosutheutun), census, v, 492
  location, VI, 702
  population, VI, 702
Cosutheutun. *See* Cosulhentan.
Cotch er e marthla, a Creek chief, IV, 576
Coteau des Prairie, Indian quarry at, IV, 143
Cotonay, cranial measurements, II, 335
  See also Kutenai.
Cotton, blankets of, in New Mexico, II, 28
  extent of cultivation, I, 80
  fabrics, manufactured by Moquis and Pimos, IV, 33
    observed by Columbus, v, 28
    possessed by Tusayans, IV, 25, 33
  plant, spread of, IV, 115
    trend of migration shown by, IV, 115, 132

Cotton—Continued
    production, among Choctaws, vi, 526
    taxes paid in, iv, 444
    use in West Indies, iv, 443
Cotton, John, missionary work of, vi, 734, 735, 736
Couch, Rev. E., school conducted by, v, 694
Couexes, vi, 74
Council Bluffs agency, condition of Indians at, iv, 465–466
Council-fire, Onondaga, story of origin, iii, 314–317
Councilman, office of, i, 194
Councils, at Clear Lake, iii, 106, 108, 109
    authority of, i, 194, 275
    calling of, i, 193, 277
    crime punished by, ii, 183
    functions among the Comanches, i, 231
    manner of conducting, ii, 130, 183; iv, 342
    procedure in, i, 276, 311
Counting, method of, ii, 178
    See also Numeral system; Numeration.
Cour d'Alenes, Cour d'Aliens. *See* Coeur d'Alene.
Courtship, Creek customs, v, 268
Couse root, preparation for food, v, 656
Coutaria, classification, iii, 402
    See also Kutenai.
Coutenay. *See* Cootenays.
Coutts, Lt., ii, 107
Cow-e-litz. *See* Cowlitz.
Cow e ta, Cowetas (town), v, 254
    a Lower Creek town, iv, 578; v, 262
    chiefs of, iv, 579
    Oglethorpe's conference at, v, 278
Cowetas (tribe), vi, 376
    at battle at Attasee, vi, 368
    attitude in Creek war, vi, 369, 376
    emigration to land of, v, 259
    relations with Five Nations, iii, 186
    See also Caouitas; Canitas.
Cowe-wa-chin, location, iv, 598
    mention of language, iv, 600
Cowichan. *See* Cowe-wa-chin.
Cowlitz (Cow-e-litz), iii, 632; vi, 686, 703
    and Upper Chihalis, location, v, 490; vi, 703
        merger, v, 703
        population, v, 490; vi, 703
    classification, iii, 402
    location, iv, 599; v, 703
        maps showing, iii, 96, 200
    mention of language of, iv, 600
    Oregon tribe, v, 577
    population, i, 521; iv, 599; v, 705; vi, 686, 701
Cowlitz River, tribes on, vi, 703
Cow-ye-ka, a Lower Creek town, iv, 578
Cox, Col., death of, vi, 288
Coxcox, v, 102
    the Toltec god, v, 63
Coxe, Ross, ii, 29
Coyateros. *See* Coyoteros.
Coyle, Wyat C., marauding activities of, iv, 593
Coyotens. *See* Coyoteros.
Coyotero Apaches, map showing location of, iv, 24
Coyoteros (Coyateros, Coyotens), an Apache division, iv, 216; v, 203, 689
    mention of dialect of, v, 203
    travelers attacked by, iv, 82
    See also Gilands; Kiataws.
Coytmore, Lt., death of, vi, 239
Cradleboard, Blackfeet, description of, v, 182
Cradles, carving on, iv, 72
    description of, ii, 66–67
    illustrations of, ii, 69
    Navajo, described, iv, 435
        illustrated, iv, 74
    object in construction of, ii, 513
Crafts. *See* Arts and crafts; Handicrafts.
Craig, Wm., information obtained from, v, 652
Crane, The, treaty signed by, vi, 344
    See also Tarhe.
Cranes, domesticated by the Congarees, iv, 157
    hunters attacked by, iv, 103

Crania, IV, 350–351
  classification based on, VI, 573–574
  internal capacity, II, 332–335
  measurements, II, 330
  See also Cranial capacity; Skulls.
Cranial capacity, in relation to intellect, V, 243–244
  Iroquois, III, 250
  Mandan, III, 250
  See also Cranial measurements; Mental capacity.
Cranial measurements, II, 331–335
  table of, II, 335
  See also Cranial capacity.
Craven, Governor, IV, 159
Crawford, Col., death of, at the stake, V, 139
  sacrificed by Indians, IV, 51
Crawford, Mr., prominent trader at Prairie du Chien, III, 279
Crawford, Wm. H., letter from, regarding Indian lands, II, 581
  letter to, regarding Indian lands, II, 582–583
Crawford Seminary, closing of, IV, 592
Creation, belief concerning, III, 276
  Indian conception of, IV, 664
  of Negro, Indian version, IV, 229
  representative deities of, III, 327
Creation myths. *See* Origin traditions.
Creator, Indian belief in, VI, 572
Cree Indians, VI, 686, 695
  also called Kenistenos, V, 41
  census, VI, 556
  conquests, VI, 33
  effect of smallpox on, VI, 486
  French name for Kenistenos, V, 145
  included in Algonquin group, II, 36
  language, II, 341
  location, III, 593; VI, 556, 705
  meaning of name, V, 40
  migration, II, 27
  none in United States, I, 523
  not an independent tribe, V, 40
  population, III, 593, 609; VI, 686, 695, 705
  See also Cristeneaux; Kenistenos; Knistenaux.
Creek and Seminole wars, estimated cost of, V, 500
Creek Confederacy, languages, III, 596–597
  loose organization of, VI, 199
  tribes composing, III, 401, 404
Creek country, description, V, 258–259
  map of, V, 253
  size, V, 258
Creek Indians (Creeks), VI, 686
  account of, I, 265–283
  activities in war, V, 279, 281
  agriculture among, VI, 532
  and Seminoles, acres owned by, VI, 519
    amalgamation, IV, 574
  annuities of, II, 584, 585; VI, 533
  antiquities of, V, 100
  Appalachian tribe, III, 29
  appropriations for, II, 564
  arts and manufactures among, V, 691–693
  at battle of Mauvila, III, 44
  attack on fort at Tensaw, VI, 362
    on Wayne's army, VI, 319
  attendance at missions, V, 698
  attitude toward debts, I, 283
  boundaries, settlement of, VI, 455
    western, V, 257
  Busk ceremony of, VI, 631
  census, IV, 575–581; V, 504; VI, 690
  ceremonies, V, 264–268; VI, 631
  change in life, I, 279
  chiefs, list of, IV, 575–576
  Colonization, plan for, VI, 412
    difficulties with regarding, VI, 416–419
  condition, after removal, VI, 522, 532–535
    general, VI, 517
  conquests, VI, 365
  council, with Comanches, IV, 470
  defeat, by General Floyd, VI, 362
  description, V, 251–283
  divisions, VI, 332
  dwellings, V, 692
  eating habits, V, 274
  funds required for, II, 567–568
  government, V, 279–282, 504, 577; VI, 533
  green-corn dance, V, 685
  group including, I, 197
  head flattening among, II, 325
  hostilities with, VI, 365–374
    end of, VI, 374, 477–478

Creek Indians (Creeks)—Continued
  illustration of house of, v, 394
  in Neosho colony, IV, 460
  influence of English on, v, 275
  intelligence, VI, 532
  intermarriage with Scotch, VI, 351
  lands, IV, 574
    ceded by, II, 602; VI, 445
    cessions of, law regarding, VI, 417
      negotiations concerning, III, 575
    claimed by, III, 584
    purchased from, II, 594, 595, 598, 599, 600
  language, III, 596–597
  location, III, 40, 584, 596; v, 99; VI, 704
    map showing, III, 96; VI, 519
  manners and customs, v, 272–283
  map of country occupied by, v, 253
  map showing colony of, IV, 180
  migrations, v, 100
    tradition, v, 98; VI, 186
  missionary work among, v, 698; VI, 734, 736, 738, 739, 740
  name, origin of, VI, 333
    legal, proposed for, v, 498
  negotiations with, reference to, VI, 409
  of Georgia, emigration, VI, 488
  opposition to schools, IV, 478
  origin, v, 259
  orphan, investments for, II, 563
  population, I, 518, 522, 523; III, 584, 596; IV, 574; v, 263, 483; VI, 369, 532, 686, 704, 708
  position in Revolutionary War, VI, 295–296
  power, end of, 373
  progress, state of, v, 506
  public square of, v, 264–265
  relations with De Soto, III, 41
    with Whites, v, 278
  religious beliefs, v, 269–270
  removal, IV, 460, 484–485; VI, 479, 497, 515–516
    condition after, VI, 522, 532–535
    opposition to, II, 417
    plans for, III, 578
    trouble regarding, v, 466–467
    voluntary, v, 450
Creek Indians (Creeks)—Continued
  revolt against double punishment, IV, 471–472
  secretive nature, I, 265
  skirmishes with, on St. John's River, VI, 359–360
  slavery among, VI, 332
  social organization, I, 274–277
  statistics, fiscal, IV, 571; VI, 720, 722, 723
    on lands of, II, 605
  stature, IV, 349
    disparity in, II, 318
  tattooing among, v, 216
  towns, v, 262
    list of, IV, 575, 576
  treaties made with, v, 499, 577; VI, 332, 334, 365, 380, 402, 403, 417, 418–419
  tribes absorbed by, VI, 370
    composing, v, 260
  villages, v, 262
  war customs, v, 280
  war with, VI, 365–376
    Chickasaw, I, 311
    in South Carolina, VI, 185
  warriors, estimate of, III, 557; v, 263
  See also Creeks, Lower; Creeks, Upper; Machecous; Muskogees.
Creek language, III, 596–597
  See also Muskogee language.
Creek towns, list, v, 262
  population, VI, 333
  See also Creek towns, Lower; Creek towns, Upper.
Creek towns, Lower, census of, IV, 581
  list, IV, 578; v, 262
  location, v, 256
Creek towns, Upper, census of, IV, 577
  index to, IV, 578
  list, IV, 578; v, 262
Creek war, account of, VI, 365–376
Creeks, Lower, allies of the English, v, 278
  location of villages, v, 256
  population, v, 498
  relative condition, VI, 533
Creeks, Upper, condition after removal, VI, 533–534
  population, v, 498
  relations with the French, v, 278

- Cremation, among Clear Lake Indians, iii, 108, 112
  - among the Five Nations, iii, 193
  - among the Tacullies, i, 102
  - ceremony described, iv, 225–226
  - custom among Hindoos, v, 59
  - not practiced by Dacotahs, iv, 66
  - not practiced by Winnebago, iv, 55
  - on the Pacific coast, v, 29
  - practiced by California tribes, v, 217
  - practiced by Sacramento tribes, vi, 710
- Cresap, Capt. Michael, account of life of, iii, 340
  - connection with Logan massacre, iii, 56
  - exploring party commanded by, vi, 263–264
  - part taken by, in Indian war, iv, 622, 624, 625, 628–629
- Cresswicks, vi, 186
- Cretin, Rev. Joseph, missionary work of, v, 699
- Crime, Indian attitude toward, ii, 131, 193
  - Indian conception of, ii, 195
  - *See also* Infanticide; Murder; Theft; Punishment; Retaliation.
- Cristeneaux (Christinaux), country occupied by, iii, 559
  - estimate of warriors, iii, 556, 559
  - totem, iii, 556
  - *See also* Cree Indians.
- Croatan, vi, 86
  - association with lost colony, vi, 94
  - explanation of name, v, 577
  - location, vi, 92
  - reference to colony at, i, 126
- Croghan, Col., iii, 279; iv, 245
  - defeat of army of, vi, 375
- Cromwell, Oliver, land granted by, v, 675
- Crooks, Ramsay, catalogs of sales furnished by, vi, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730
- Crookshanks, Dr. A., i, 84
- Cross, near Pisco, Peru, description of, v, 659
- Cross Sound Indians, census of, v, 489
- Crow Indians, i, 219; vi, 686 698, 699
  - bands, iii, 630
  - Blackfeet named by, v, 686
  - called Minnetarees, iii, 514
  - census, vi, 556
  - classification, iii, 402
  - enemies of Blackfeet, v, 181
    - of Mandans, iii, 253
  - general condition, vi, 696
  - language, iii, 630
  - liquor not used by, vi, 696
  - location, iii, 514, 595, 630; v, 494; vi, 556, 695, 705
    - map showing, iii, 96
  - origin, story of, iii, 251
  - population, i, 257, 523; iii, 595, 630, 631; v, 494; vi, 686, 695, 696, 705
  - relation to Wattasoons, iii, 251
  - resemblance to Shoshonee, i, 217
  - Shoshoni expelled by, v, 198
  - skull, shape of, ii, 317
  - smallpox, effect of, i, 257; vi, 486
    - escape from, iii, 254
  - wars of, reference to, i, 206
  - *See also* Absarokas; Upsarokas.
- Crow language, iii, 514
  - distinct nature of, iii, 630
  - *See also* Upsaroka language.
- Crown Point, attempt to capture, vi, 220
  - English repulse at, vi, 226
- Crowne, Sir William, land granted to, v, 675
- Crow-wing River, Indian name for, ii, 157
- Crozat, M., iii, 355; vi, 185
- Crozet, reference to grant to, i, 137
- Crucibles, discovery of, iv, 171; vi, 610
  - earthen, described, iv, 161–162
  - supposed use by Indians, iv, 164
- Crystallization, in the north, i, 171
- Cube Hatcha, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
- Cuchans (Cushans), v, 214
  - characteristics, ii, 116
  - facial painting of, ii, 113
  - honesty, ii, 117
  - population, ii, 115
  - Yuma division, ii, 115
  - *See also* Yuma.
- Cu-cu-pahs, Cucupas. *See* Cocopa.
- Culbertson, T. A., iii, 250

Cul Blanc, III, 360, 362
  death of, III, 363
Culiacan, IV, 22, 23, 24, 32
  Spanish expedition at, VI, 69
Culture, Indian, as observed by explorers, V, 107–109
  at time of discovery, V, 88–90
  See also Civilization.
Culture heroes, absence, among the Dacotah, III, 232
  Indian belief in, I, 18
  See also Gods.
Cumanches. *See* Comanches.
Cumberland Gap, Indian fortification at, IV, 134–135
Cumberland River, ancient name of, VI, 32
  brief description, III, 343
  productions of region, III, 344
  trade in region, III, 344
Cumming, D. B., data by, on Cherokee missions, IV, 588
Cummings, Mr., U. S. Agent, vocabularies by, II, 470
Cum que kis, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census, V, 488
Cum sha was, census of, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Cunshewa. *See* Cum sha was.
Cuneiform writing of Persia, I, 423
Cunningham's Island, antiquities of, II, 86–87
  inscription on, III, 85–87
Cupping, method used in, IV, 516
  operation of, IV, 242
Curly Head, Chief, brief biography of, IV, 554
Curry, Mr., charges made by, VI, 475
Curry, Thomas, fur trade of, VI, 269
Cuscarawaoc. *See* Huokarawaocks.
Cusco monuments, conclusions drawn from, IV, 114
Cushans. *See* Cuchans.
Cush-eh-tah Indians, history of, I, 309
  See also Koasati.
Cushhooks (Clishhooks), location, III, 572
  population, III, 572, 609
Cushman, Rev. Mr., Indians praised by, II, 25
Cushna language, vocabulary, II, 494–505, 506–508
Cushnas, location, VI, 710
  population, VI, 710
Cushook. *See* Cushhooks.
Cusic, David, cited on mounds, IV, 137
  discussion of pamphlet by, I, 125
  historical sketches by, V, 631–646
  reference to work of, V, 86
  tradition recorded by, IV, 117
Cusic, Nicholas, Tuscaroras represented by, VI, 326
Cus se taw, a Lower Creek town, IV, 578
  chiefs of, IV, 579
Cus se taw hajo, of Talladega Town, IV, 576
Cus se taw mic co, a Cussetaw Town chief, IV, 579
Cussitahs, a Lower Creek town, V, 262
Custaloga, Delawares represented by, VI, 261, 262
Customs. *See* Manners and Customs. *See also* Burial customs; Ceremonies; Dances; Feasts; Fishing customs; Hunting customs; Marriage customs; Menstrual customs; Mourning customs; Naming customs; Sacrifices; War customs, etc.; *and also* under tribal names.
Cutifachiqui. *See* Cofatchequi.
Cutler, Dr. Manasseh, IV, 131
Cutssahnim (Cutsanim), location, III, 572
  population, III, 572, 609; V, 706
  See also Yackima.
Cutsanim. *See* Cutsahnim.
Cutshamekin, a New England chief, V, 231
Cuttawas, a synonym of Catawbas (q. v.), III, 292
Cutthewekasaw, treaty signed by, VI, 344
Cuvier, races classified by, IV, 355
Cuzco, mention of temple at, V, 659
Cypriano, a Tuolumne chief, IV, 407

D

Dablon, Claude, missionary work of, V, 184, 648
Dacota Indians, Dacotahs, Dacotas. *See* Dakota.

- Dacota language(s). *See* Dakota language(s).
- Dacotah potato, description of, iv, 68
  - Indian name for, iv, 68
- Dade, Maj., ambuscade and death of, vi, 216, 468, 469
- Dahcotas. *See* Dakotas.
- Dahlonega, gold found at, iii, 41
- Dahno-habe band, at Clear Lake council, iii, 109
  - meaning of name, iii, 110
- Dakota Indians (Dacotas, Dacotahs, Dahcotas, Dakotahs), iv, 686
  - average size, iv, 349–350
  - bands or villages, ii, 168–169; vi, 350
  - beliefs, i, 33; ii, 197–198
  - brain cavity, ii, 332
  - brief account of, ii, 37
  - census, i, 498–507
  - ceremony of, vi, 385
    - illustrated, vi, 385
  - Chippewa name for, iii, 515
  - classification, iii, 402
  - country occupied by, i, 137, 183, 247; iii, 612; vi, 34
  - cranial capacity, v, 244; vi, 574
  - cranial measurements, ii, 335
  - customs, ii, 168–199; iii, 233–246; iv, 59–72
  - De Soto in territory of, ii, 34–35; vi, 66
  - divisions, i, 498; iii, 612
  - Dog Dance of, ii, 79–80
  - dwellings, ii, 191–192
  - education among, v, 695–697
  - encampment, illustrated, ii, 190
  - enemies of Blackfeet, v, 181
  - ethnic group, ii, 343
  - fabric made by, iv, 139
  - food, reference to, i, 41
  - generic stock, ii, 33; vi, 34
  - geographical position, i, 498
  - Giant feast and dance of, iii, 487–488; iv, 64
  - gods of, discussed, ii, 224; iii, 485–487
    - illustrated, iii, 485
  - history, i, 247–248; ii, 168–199
  - hunting customs, ii, 185–186
  - known by moccasins, iii, 66
  - leading men, iii, 612
- Dakota Indians—Continued
  - legend of, i, 329–332
  - manners, ii, 168–199; iii, 233–246; iv, 59–72
  - map of country, ii, 137
  - map showing location, ii, 28, 137; iii, 96
  - medical knowledge, iv, 492; vi, 631–632
  - medical practices, ii, 179–182
  - medicine men, iv, 641–651
  - migration tradition, i, 247–248
  - missionary work among, vi, 738, 739
  - mythology, iii, 231–233; vi, 648–657
  - name, meaning of, i, 248; ii, 170
  - numeral system, ii, 178; v, 244
  - of the Mississippi, described, i, 247–256
  - of the river, ruler of, vi, 386
  - Ojibwa opinion of, ii, 156
  - picture writing among, i, 338
  - population, i, 498, 523; ii, 170; iii, 612, 614; vi, 275
  - pressure on, by Algonquins, i, 259
  - religion and mythology, iii, 225–233; vi, 648–657
  - sale of lands of, iv, 485
  - Scalp dance, illustrated, ii, 63; vi, 65
  - sun worship among, vi, 629
  - superstitious observances of, iv, 495–496
  - supreme deity of, iii, 511
  - synonymous with Sioux, ii, 168
  - term used for Siouan family, ii, 37, 168
  - three grand divisions, i, 248
  - tribes composing, ii, 37; vi, 34
  - union among, vi, 199
  - village of, illustrated, ii, 192
  - war customs, ii, 57–58
  - war-shirt, illustrated, iii, 67
  - winter cap, illustrated, iii, 68
  - *See also* Aboinug; La Sue; Sioux; Soos.
- Dakota (Dacota, Dacotah, Dakotah) language(s), v, 696
  - deficiencies of, v, 696
  - geographical names in, with derivation, iv, 384
  - Lord's Prayer in, v, 592

Dakota—Continued
  publications in, IV, 546–551
  similarity in dialects of, II, 170
  use of the term, II, 37
  vocabulary (numerals), II, 206–208
Dakotahs. *See* Dakota Indians.
Dalles Indians, location, V, 490; VI, 700
  population, V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 700
Dalton, Capt., fraud perpetrated by, V, 276
D'Allyon. *See* Vasquez D'Allyon.
D'Alva, Ferdinand, I, 21
Dalzell, Capt., at seige of Detroit, II, 241, 304, 305, 306; VI, 247
  death of, VI, 247
  defeated by Pontiac, VI, 287
Danaus, reference to collyzium of, IV, 511
Dancers, Moqui, illustration showing, IV, 74
  See also Costumes, Dances.
Dances, Arrow, described, IV, 80
  Beggar's, illustrated, III, 62
    object of, III, 62
  costumes for, III, 217, 487; IV, 74, 77, 79, 83–84
  Dog, of the Dakota, II, 79–80
    of Seneca and Shawnee, IV, 591
  Fish, IV, 64
  funeral, briefly described, III, 286
  Giant's, described, III, 487–488; IV, 64
    illustrated, III, 487, 488
  Green Corn, III, 89; V, 685
  Hawk-feast, V, 215
  magical, of Ontonagons, III, 488–491
    illustrated, III, 489
  Medicine, III, 286–288; IV, 63
    illustrated, III, 286
  Moon, IV, 63–64
  Moqui, at Christmas, IV, 74–75
  of Creeks, V, 277
  of Dakotahs, II, 79–80; III, 487–488; IV, 63–64
  of deprecation, described, V, 215
  of honor, brief account of, III, 217
  of peace and plenty, V, 215
  Peace, described, III, 173
  Pipe, Winnebago, III, 286
  puberty, description, V, 215
  Rain, of Moqui, IV, 83–85
Dances—Continued
  religious, of California tribes, V, 214–215
  Round, IV, 63
  Scalp, described, III, 285; IV, 63
    illustrated, VI, 65
  Sun, IV, 63
  to the moon, IV, 63–64
  Victory, IV, 79–80; V, 215
  war, described, III, 187, 285; IV, 52, 62, 63
Dancing, among the Winnebago, III, 284–286
  manner of, III, 286; IV, 74
Danforth, Dr., inscription copied by, IV, 119
Daniel and Brebeuf, deaths of, V, 647
  mission established by, V, 647
Darke, Col., charge under command of, VI, 336
Dart, Anson, report by, on population, III, 632
Dart, Dr., population estimated by, V, 707; VI, 700
Dartmouth College, founding of, V, 519
Dasamonqupeuc. *See* Dessamopeak.
Davies, Col., death of, VI, 355
Davis, Col. S. B., III, 383
Davis, Dr., altar-mounds investigated by, I, 73
Davis, Lt. Alonzo, III, 376
Davis, E. H., reference to work of, I, 47
Davis, Rev. Solomon, work of, IV, 527–528
Davy, Sir Humphrey, IV, 504
Dawson, Senator, of Georgia, Indian legislation discussed by, V, 466–467
D'Allyon, Father Joseph de la Roche, Neuters visited by, IV, 205
D'Allyon, Vasquez, encounter of, with Chicora Indians, VI, 743
  mention of failure of, V, 410
Dead, respect for, I, 354–355; II, 70, 196; V, 92, 105; VI, 619
  See also Death; Burials; Burial customs.
Deagothee, Loochoo (Degothees), language, III, 542
  population, II, 28
Dean, James, paper by, VI, 666–670
Dean's Canal, Indians living on, V, 487

Death, customs concerning, II, 67–71
  Indian attitude toward, IV, 638; V, 81
  See also Burial customs; Graves; Mourning customs.
Death-song, paraphrase of, VI, 621
  words, II, 62
De Bruhl, Jesse, IV, 160
De Bry, II, 23
Debt, Indian attitude toward, II, 195
De Chutes. *See* Des Chutes.
Decimal system, use of, by Indians, V, 244
Decline of Indian tribes, causes of, VI, 561–575
Decoign, earthworks explained by, V, 116
Decoration, of Florida pottery, III, 79–81
  of pottery, illustrated, III, 80
  See also Costumes; Ornaments; Ornamentation.
De Corrie and Tshoop, rulers of the Winnebagoes, VI, 386
Deep Creek, peculiarity of, V, 202
Deer hunting, II, 53–54
  range, I, 433
Deerfield, Mass., Indian attack on, VI, 159
Deforest and Abbot, mention of murder of, I, 217
Deformation. *See* Head deformation.
Degothees. *See* Deagothee Loochoo.
De Guzman, Nuño, search of, for Cibola, IV, 22
De Harley, A., statistics furnished by, V, 700
De Hass, Dr. Wills, I, 122; V, 34
Deiskau, Count de, VI, 287
  battle led by, VI, 220
Deities, dual, belief in, V, 31, 69
  of oriental nations, V, 406
  See also Gods.
Deity, belief in duality of, III, 60
  Choctaw name for, V, 72
  Dacota name for, V, 72
  Indian attitude toward, V, 30
  Indian conception of, IV, 635, 638; V, 393
  Indian words for, III, 511; IV, 526, 527, 530, 531, 540, 551
  Iroquois name for, V, 72
Deity—Continued
  the world declined in Chippewa language, V, 416
  See also Monedo.
Dejean, missionary, IV, 538
Dekanefora, Chief, III, 519; V, 523
De la Barre, Gov. Gen., IV, 627; V, 671
De Laet, theory of, regarding Indians, V, 51
De Lancey, Lt. Gov., quotation from letter by, VI, 222
Delaware [State], population and area, IV, 610
Delaware language, II, 36
  Algonquin dialect, II, 341
  richness and variety of, II, 357–358
  publications in, IV, 540–541
  vocabulary, II, 470–481; III, 424–427
Delaware Loups, estimate of warriors of, III, 555
Delaware mission, data on, IV, 588
Delaware River, Indian name for, V, 593
  Indians on, VI, 177
  origin of name, V, 136
  tribes of region of, V, 38
Delawares, V, 147; VI, 132, 133, 430, 687
  affiliations, IV, 621
  Allegans overpowered by, V, 98
  alliance with Iroquois, V, 136
  also called Munsees, V, 41
  and Munsees, brief account of, III, 561
    population, VI, 275
    warriors, III, 561
  and others, battle with, VI, 266
  and Shawnees, population, VI, 708
  annuities of, II, 585, 586, 588, 589
  appropriation for, II, 564
  at Braddock's defeat, VI, 217, 218
  at council with Sir William Johnson, VI, 233
  attack on, by Sioux, VI, 543
  attitude toward the colonies, VI, 242
  census, I, 488–497; III, 621–628
  classification, III, 401; V, 136
  conquest by Iroquois, III, 74
  converts to Christianity, VI, 317–318

Delawares—Continued

- country occupied by, i, 488; iii, 559, 583, 585, 592; iv, 461; v, 38, 122, 135, 140, 142, 495, 669; vi, 705
- dialect of, reference to, iii, 96
- dwelling grounds, vi, 714
- expulsion from Chicomico, vi, 299
  - from Pennsylvania, vi, 236–237
- forays on colonists, vi, 219
- French name for, v, 136
- funds required for, ii, 568
- general condition, iv, 466
- history, v, 135–142
- home of, original, v, 495
- hunting grounds, vi, 714
- in Kentucky, i, 300
- included in Christian Indians, v, 506
- intruders in Texas, i, 240
- investments for, ii, 563
- lands, iv, 572
  - ceded by, ii, 602, 603, 604; vi, 445
  - claimed by, iii, 583, 585
  - conveyed permanently to, v, 457
  - disposal of, v, 496
  - loss of, iii, 342–343
  - purchased from, ii, 593, 595, 598, 599, 600
- loss of territory of, iii, 342–343
- map showing location of, iii, 96; iv, 180; vi, 519
- massacre of, at Gnadenhutten, vi, 299, 317–318
- migrations, iv, 280; v, 122, 140; vi, 197, 316, 317
- mission founded among, v, 503
- missionary work among, vi, 734, 736, 737, 738, 739
- mission church of, v, 698
- Moravian, massacre by Whites, v, 139
- Moravian, misconception regarding, vi, 316–317
- name, for themselves, vi, 573
  - origin of, v, 136
  - other names for, v, 41
- neutrality misunderstood, v, 138, 139
- origin tradition, v, 683
- outrages by, mention of, v, 527
- peace made by, v, 139

Delawares—Continued

- peace sought by, vi, 254, 259, 260, 261, 343
- population, i, 518, 523; iii, 424, 583, 585, 592, 609, 610, 635; iv, 572; v, 140, 142, 495, 708; vi, 271, 272, 687, 699, 705, 714
- rank among tribes, i, 268; v, 136
- relation to Shawnees, vi, 278
- removal, iii, 74; iv, 460; v, 142, 495; vi, 516, 536
  - condition after, vi, 481, 542, 544
  - plans for, iii, 254, 259, 260, 261, 343
- stand taken by, in Revolutionary War, vi, 277, 281, 293, 295, 299–301
- standing among tribes, i, 268; v, 136
- statistics, fiscal, vi, 720, 721, 722, 723
  - on land of, ii, 605, 606
- subjection of, to Iroquois, iv, 616, 620–621; v, 137
- synopsis of treaty with, v, 496
- territory of, loss iii, 342–343
  - map showing location, iii, 96; iv, 180; vi, 519
- treaty made with, v, 499; vi, 303, 327, 330, 334
  - statement of, v, 497
- tribes joining, on Kanzas River, vi, 504
- warriors, number of, iii, 555, 559; iv, 605; vi, 261, 271
- war with, beginning, vi, 264
- *See also* Lenape Indians.

De Legneris, commander at Fort DuQuesne, vi, 227

De Leon, Ponce. *See* Leon, Ponce de

De Levi, vi, 234

Del Monte Atlamaxaczingo, a Mexican settlement, iii, 542

De Louvigney, Outagamies defeated by, vi, 194

Delre, Pierre, vi, 79

Deluge, the Algonquin tradition of, vi, 571–572
- Aztec version, vi, 638
- Indian belief in, i, 17; iv, 230, 231; v, 173; vi, 571
- Indian traditions of, v, 31, 687
- Iowa tradition of, iii, 263

Deluge—Continued
  Iroquois version, VI, 670
  South American tradition of, V, 63
Demere, commander at Fort Loudon, VI, 241
Demon worship, noted by early writers, V, 107
Demonology, IV, 489–497; V, 415–441
  See also Witchcraft.
Demons, beliefs concerning, IV, 100; V, 76–77, 408
Dencke, C. F., translation by, IV, 540
De Niger, Pit, IV, 341
Denis, Jean, chart published by, VI, 48
De Niza, Marcos, explorations of, VI, 69
Dennison, Capt., at Eel River, III, 132
Denonvillee, Gov., relations of, with Six Nations, V, 522–523
  repelled by Iroquois, VI, 190
Deonoyers, information carried by, II, 254
De-o-se-o-wa, meaning of name, IV, 563
  Seneca name for Buffalo, N. Y., IV, 563
De Pauw, opinion of, regarding Indian tribes, III, 55
Depopulation, causes of, I, 202; II, 95, 172
  See also under Population.
Descent, among the Iroquois, IV, 619
  matrilineal, I, 275; III, 195; IV, 481, 666; VI, 627
  of chiefs, IV, 666; V, 73, 273
  of property, I, 283
  See also Heredity.
Des Chutes (De Chutes), VI, 686
  census, V, 493
  location, V, 493
  population, I, 521; III, 632; V, 706, 707; VI, 686, 700, 701
Des Chutes (Dachutes) River, investigations on, V, 101
  valley of, described, I, 221–222
Designs, in dental pictography, VI, 631
  pottery, III, 79–81
  pottery, illustrated, III, 80
  See also Decoration.
De Solis, reference to history of, V, 88
De Soto, Hernando (Ferdinand), II, 32
  army of, VI, 59
  at Tampa Bay, illustration of, III, 35
  attitude toward antiquities, V, 108
De Soto, Hernando—Continued
  cause of hostility to, III, 26
  Creek opposition to, VI, 369
  death and burial of, III, 49; VI, 67, 743
  defeated by Indians, V, 410
  difficulties encountered by, IV, 309
  discovery of the Mississippi by, VI, 743
  earthworks attributed to, VI, 602
  expedition of, I, 134; II, 21, 34–35; III, 33–50; IV, 29–30; V, 646; VI, 58–68, 743
  forces commanded by, III, 34
  hogs introduced by, VI, 616
  mounds erroneously attributed to, IV, 132
  northern limit reached by, IV, 132, 321
  place of death, III, 50
  route of, discussed, III, 50
    map of, III, 50
  sun worship found by, V, 63
  tour of region traversed by, IV, 278–324
  with Pizarro in Peru, III, 33–34
Dessamopeak Indians, colony attacked by, VI, 93
  hostilities with, VI, 92
Detius, reference to works of, IV, 510–511
Detroit, attack on, by Outagamies, VI, 193
  change of garrison at, VI, 344
  fort at, described, III, 334
  founding of, VI, 183, 185, 197
  in 1820, description of, VI, 382
  reference to post at, V, 108
  siege of, by Pontiac, VI, 243–245
  surrender of, VI, 234, 359
  See also Fort Detroit.
Detroit Chippewas, census of, I, 458–467
Detroit River, former application of the name, VI, 256
  Indian name for, V, 594
  Indians on, VI, 275
Detroit, Straits of, repossessed by the French, VI, 197
  tribes on, VI, 33
Detsanayuka. *See* No-ko-nies.

De Vaca, Caba, exaggerated tales of, vi, 58–59
  expeditions influenced by, vi, 69
  wanderings of, iii, 33
  See also Cabeça de Vaca (Caba de Vaca).
Diahago, tribes living at, vi, 714
Dialects, of the Muskogees, i, 268
  Oneida, dual in, iv, 117
  Onondaga, dual in, iv, 117
  origin of, ii, 47
  See also Languages.
Dianderoga, church founded at, v, 513
Diarrhea, treatment for, iv, 512
Diaz del Castillo, Bernal, reference to journal of, v, 88
  reference to works of, vi, 577
Diaz, Melchior, exploration led by, iv, 38
Dickenson, Dr., reference to work of, i, 47
Dictionary, English-Chippewa [through "A"], v, 565–569
Dieguenos. *See* Diegunos.
Diegunos, brief description of, ii, 100
  population, ii, 100
  Spanish mission among, v, 214, 216
  vocabulary, ii, 103–104
Digger Indians, account of, v, 198–199
  bands composing, v, 199
  condition, i, 206
  country occupied by bands of, v, 201
  cremation practiced by, vi, 634
  eastern boundary of, i, 220
  food, i, 221
  population, v, 498
  synonym of Shoshonee, i, 206
Dighton Rock, i, 412; v, 85
  ballista, representation, i, 284
  description, i, 110–111
  illustration of, i, 114; iv, 120
  location, i, 110
  referred to, by Cotton Mather, i, 285–286
  sun symbols on, v, 64; vi, 629
  symbols of sun-worship on, v, 30
  two inscriptions on, i, 111
  See also Dighton Rock inscription.
Dighton Rock inscription (Assonet inscription), i, 108–120; iv, 119–120; vi, 113–114, 609
Dighton Rock inscription—Continued
  detail of, i, 119
  fallacy concerning, iv, 117
  possibly Chippewa, i, 304
Dighton Rock League, vi, 166
Dillenbach, Martin, iv, 341
Dinwiddie, Gov., iii, 294; vi, 215
  mission dispatched by, vi, 213
Dionderoga, meaning of name, iii, 328
Dionondades. *See* Tionontates.
Discoidal stones, description of, i, 83; iv, 161, 163
  illustration of, i, 86; vi, 312, 313
  use in games, i, 82–83
Diseases, and remedies, Creek, v, 270–271
  beliefs concerning, i, 250; iv, 491–492, 507–508; vi, 634
  inflicted as punishment, iv, 650
  introduction, by Whites, iii, 202
  traceable to civilization, iv, 503–504
  treatment of, Dacota, i, 250–255
  treatment of, in the Dark Ages, iv, 508–511
  See also Medical practices; Medicine men; Plants, medicinal; and under separate names of diseases.
Disintegration, action of, exemplified in Lake Superior, i, 167
Distaff. *See* Spindle.
Distance, Indian ideas concerning, vi, 208
District of Columbia, population and area of, iv, 610
Ditsakana. *See* Yamparacks.
Divorce, among the Dacotah, iii, 240
  among the Moquis, iv, 87
  See also Marriage customs.
Dixon, Col. Robert, iii, 279
Doaksville, description of village of, vi, 527
Doctor, Indian, concocting medicine, illustration showing, v, 446
  ceremony of qualification for, vi, 633
  Dakotah, influence and methods of, vi, 655–657
  unsuccessful, attitude toward, vi, 622
  See also Medicine man.
Dodge, and others, census taken by, v, 668

Dodge, Gov., III, 281
Dodge, Gen. Henry, treaty concluded by, VI, 483
Dodge, John, Canadian posts described by, III, 334
Dodge, Col. S., assistance rendered by, VI, 454
Dog dance, Dacota, described, II, 79–80
    illustrated, II, 80
    object of, II, 80
    of Senecas and Shawnees, IV, 591
Dog-ribs (Dog-ribbed tribes), an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
    beard, II, 322
    population, II, 27
Dog Warrior, chief of the Natchez, V, 263
Dogs, as an offering at feasts, V, 439–440
    eating of flesh of, III, 187, 287
    legend of origin, V, 193
    sacrifice, IV, 591; V, 56
        by war-party, IV, 52
    See also White Dog sacrifice.
Dolores Mission, date of founding, II, 506
    tribes of, II, 506
Domaigaia, a captive Iroquois, VI, 54, 55
Domestic animals. *See* Animals.
Domestic Mission Board Southern Baptist Convention, data on missions of, VI, 740
Doniphan (Donophan) Col. A. W., expedition led by, I, 246; III, 297; IV, 40, 209
Donnaconna, Chief, V, 76; VI, 200
    meeting with the French, VI, 56
    statement made by, I, 134–135
D'Orbigny, M. Aleide [Alcide Dessalines], cited on head-flattening, II, 327
    mention of researches of, II, 328
Dorimus, Rev. J. E. C., acknowledgment to, III, 376
Doty, Mr., population estimated by, VI, 698, 699
Dougherty, Mr., III, 391
Dougherty, Rev. Peter, III, 376, 384
    vocabulary by, II, 458
    work of, IV, 533, 534
Douglas, Capt., reference to work of, I, 143; VI, 390
Douglas, Gov., IV, 602
Doyle, Winchester, land assigned to, IV, 581
Drake, Dr., I, 184
Drake, Sir Francis, II, 22.
    colonists rescued by, VI, 86–87
    colony relieved by, VI, 92
    reference to voyage of, VI, 510
Draper, Lyman, IV, 133
Drawings, Indian, showing operations of war-chief, IV, 495
    showing contest between two gods, IV, 496
Dreams, belief in, II, 144; VI, 660
    influence of, VI, 664
    means of inducing, VI, 664
    reliance on, IV, 52, 638
Drennan, John, vocabulary transmitted by, II, 204
Dress. *See* Clothing.
Dropsy, treatment for, IV, 512
Druids, extermination of, V, 34
Drummond Island Band, census of, I, 458–467
Drums, description of, IV, 71
    illustration of, II, 514
    Lapland, described, I, 425–426
    Moqui, description of, IV, 74
Drunkenness. *See* Intoxication.
Dryads, Indian belief in, VI, 629–630
Duane, James, V, 663
Dubois, Barent, III, 90
Dubuque, mention of mines of, VI, 384
Ducoign, Baptiste, earthworks explained by, IV, 135, 136
    Kaskaskia chief, cited, VI, 600
Dudley, Col., III, 279
    defeat of troops under, VI, 362
Dudley, Indians at, I, 287
Duffield, Rev. George, coin described by, IV, 149
Dukes, Joseph, translation by, IV, 545
Dunmore, Lord, IV, 622
    campaign against the Indians, IV, 615
    fraud aided by, V, 275
    mention of treaty made by, VI, 328
    military expedition of, VI, 263–266
Duperru, Mr., mention of, III, 129

Duponceau, Peter S., acknowledgment to, II, 357
    reference to manuscripts of, III, 398
    translations made by, II, 341, 358
Dupuis of Maskinongé, member of expedition, III, 353
Durbin, report on missions signed by, V, 700
Durkee, Mr., owner of ferry, III, 145, 147
Dusenbury, Moses, III, 165
Dusty-nose, a name for the Iowas, III, 262
Dutch, the, Indian trade with, VI, 189
Dwamish (Dwa-mish) Indians, bands of, V, 703
    location, V, 491, 703; VI, 703
    population, V, 491, 703; VI, 703
    See also Nee-wa-mish.
Dwamish Lake, Indians on, VI, 703
Dwellings, bark, II, 191–192
        illustration of, II, 192
    Creek, V, 692–693
        illustration of, V, 394
    Dacota, described, II, 191–192
        illustrated, II, 190, 192
    extremes of art in, V, 394
    fixed, northern boundary of, IV, 662
    in Peru and Mexico, V, 89, 94–95
    of caciques or chiefs, II, 83–84
    of California tribes, V, 216, 649
    of Massachusetts Indians, I, 284
    of Navajo, IV, 217; V, 204
    of Onontagers, IV, 340
    of Sacramento Valley tribes, VI, 710
    of southwestern Texas Indians, V, 682
    of Toltecs and Aztecs, I, 50–51
    on mounds, II, 83–84; IV, 124–125, 134
    Peruvian, construction of, V, 95
    Pueblo, described, IV, 76, 82
    stone, in New Mexico, II, 26
    work of women, I, 46
    See also Earth lodge; Lodge; Wigwams.
Dwight, Presbyterian station at, IV, 589
Dyer, Col., at battle at Talladega, VI, 367
Dyes, making of, IV, 69
Dyosyowan. *See* De-o-se-o-wa.
Dysentery, treatment for, IV, 512
Dyspepsia, among Indians, IV, 512

E

Eagle, the brig, wreck of, IV, 601, 602
Eagle feathers. *See* Feathers, eagle.
Eakin(s), D. W., III, 404
    assistance rendered by, I, 265
Ear ornaments, illustrations of, III, 69
Ear piercing, ceremony of, III, 239
Earth, the, beliefs concerning, III, 276; IV, 236; V, 419–420
Earthenware. *See* Pottery.
Earth lodge, construction of, VI, 710
Earthquake, at Three Wells, II, 109
    experienced by Iowas, III, 264
Earthworks, approximate period of, IV, 174
    at Lake Vieux Desert, II, 91
    built by the Creeks, V, 100
    Cunningham's Island, described, II, 87
    Indian traditions concerning, IV, 135
    in valley of the Yakama [Yakima], V, 665
    lack of, in Pacific Coast States, V, 101, 663
    length, IV, 134
    migrations traced by, V, 100
    Mississippi, Indian explanation of, V, 116
    of Little Miami valley, explained, IV, 127
    of Mississippi tribes described, V, 100
    on Wolf River, III, 274
    on Yakama [Yakima] River, VI, 612–613
    opinion regarding, of early explorers, V, 108
    reputed, on the Des Chutes, V, 663–664
    symbolism in, IV, 664
    Teton, map of, V, 100
    theory concerning builders of, VI, 601, 602
    unexplained by the Iowas, III, 264
    used in Indian warfare, V, 98
    varied purposes of, IV, 126
    See also Causeways; Fortifications; Mounds.

- Eas tee char co chop ho, a Cussetaw Town chief, iv, 579
- Eastman, Capt. S., i, 122, 185; v, 666, 667
  - drawings made by, iv, 152
  - engraving by, iv, 121
  - inscription copied by, iv, 173
  - maps and sketches by, ii, 86
  - paper by, iv, 495–496
  - pictographs preserved by, iv, 492
  - sketch prepared by, iii, 70
- Easton, Peter, extract from diary of, iv, 154
- Eating habits, Creek, v, 274
- Eaton, J. H., tribes described by, iv, 216
- Eaton, Lt. Col., remarks on the Apache, v, 203
- Eaton, Maj., Navajo population estimated by, v, 484
- Eaton, Secretary of War, views of, quoted, vi, 427
- Eccanachaca town, attack on, vi, 368
- Echeloot (Eskeloot), location, iii, 570
  - population, iii, 570, 609; v, 706
  - *See also* Nishrams; Tilhualwits.
- Echota, missionary work at, vi, 740
- Echuse-is-li-gau, meaning of name, iv, 380
- "*Eclipse*," vessel chartered by Humboldt Bay settlers, iii, 131
- Eclipses, Indian beliefs concerning, i, 271; iv, 239; v, 216, 254
- Ecumchate, derivation of name, iv, 380
- Ecunhutlee, derivation of name, iv, 380
- Edchautawoot (Edshawtawoots), an Athapascan tribe, iii, 542
  - population, ii, 27
- Education, and Christianity, statistics on, vi, 731–741
  - discussion of annuities for, vi, 539–540
  - examples of improvement through, vi, 566
  - of Indian children, ii, 50, 51; iv, 462
  - of Indians, iii, 472–475; iv, 475–479
    - in Oregon, iii, 222
    - mistake made in, vi, 553–554
    - plans for, ii, 526–537
    - problem connected, with, vi, 443
    - statistics on, v, 502
- Edwards, Amory, iv, 490
- Edwards, Gov., of Illinois, march against Peoria, vi, 360
- Edwards, Jonathan, vi, 504
  - accredited to Mahicans, v, 506
  - Lord's Prayer translated by, v, 591
  - missionary work of, v, 503; vi, 734, 736
  - reference to teachings of, vi, 321
- E-eh, a Scott's Valley band, iii, 171
- Eel River, Indian name for, iii, 127
- Eel River Indians, vi, 687
  - annuities of, ii, 586, 589
  - armistice granted to, vi, 364
  - land claimed by, iii, 584
    - purchased from, ii, 593, 599
  - location, iii, 584
  - Miami band, iii, 591
  - plans for removal, iii, 576, 577
  - population, iii, 584
  - *See also* Eel River Miamies.
- Eel River Miamies, funds required for, ii, 569
  - lands ceded by, ii, 603
    - purchased from, ii, 599
    - statistics on, ii, 605
  - *See also* Eel River Indians.
- Eel River region, described, iii, 128
  - population, vi, 711
- Eenahs (Eenaghs), location, iii, 139
- Ees tey toch, a tribe of Milbank Sound, v, 487
  - census, v, 487
- E far e marth lar, a Cussetaw Town chief, iv, 579
- E far tus ke ne haw, a Coweta Town chief, iv, 579
- Egg of Ormusd, i, 35
  - represented by Serpent Mound, i, 32
  - symbolized in earthworks, iv, 664
- Egypt, date of exodus from, v, 88
- Egyptians, copper tools used by, i, 98
  - hieroglyphic system of, i, 422
- Ehihalis, population, v, 490
  - position, v, 490
  - *See also* Chehalis.
- Eh-nek, a Quoratem band, iii, 151
- Eh-nek language, extent of use, iii, 422
  - vocabulary, iii, 440–445
- Eh-qua-nek, a Quoratem band, iii, 151
- E kuh duts ke, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
- Elder bark, medicinal use of, iv, 242

Elder Brother, The, a Pillager chief, v, 189
Eld's inlet, Indians of, vi, 703
  population, v, 491
Elements, worship of, v, 407
Eliot, John, vi, 174
  at Pawtucket, v, 232–233
  effect of preaching of, vi, 115
  Lord's Prayer translated by, v, 591
  missionary labors, i, 286; v, 225, 503; vi, 107, 516, 734, 736
  opposition to, iv, 640; vi, 321, 647
  "Praying Indians" established by, v, 225
  work on Indian languages, i, 287; ii, 355; iv, 530, 547; vi, 106, 107
Elizabeth(s) Island, discovery, vi, 96
  naming, vi, 103–104
Elizabeth River, tribe on, vi, 90
Elk, range of, i, 433
Elk Lake, supposed origin of the Mississippi, i, 143
Elk Mountains, tribe living on, v, 199
Elk River, Indian name for, iii, 131
  Indians of, vi, 702
Elkhorn River, tribe on, vi, 546
Elksatowa, Elksotawa, Elksottawa, Elksquatowa. *See* Elkswatawa.
Elkswatawa (Elksatowa, Elksotawa, Elksottawa, Elksquatowa, Ellskattawa, Elskatawa), i, 412; v, 141
  brother of Tecumseh, vi, 354
  description, vi, 424
  doctrine of, v, 151
  influence, vi, 258, 259, 353–354, 358, 374
  policies advocated by, vi, 354
  Shawnee migration led by, vi, 424
  speech made by, iv, 259–262
  speech on Shawnee migration, vi, 424–425
  Winnebagoes influenced by, iii, 279
Elliot, Rev. Adam, vocabularies by, ii, 482
Ellis, A. G., census report by, vi, 691
Ellis, Thomas, inscription interpreted by, iv, 492
Ellksattawa. *See* Elkswatawa.
Elmira, N. Y., former name of, vi, 309
  Indian councils on site of, v, 667, 670
  Indian name of, v, 669
El Moro. *See* Inscription Rock (New Mexico).
El Paso Pueblo, vi, 687
  population, vi, 687
Elskatawa. *See* Elkswatawa.
El Turco (The Turk), death of, iv, 31
  Spaniards misled by, iv, 27–31, 36, 37, 40
E mar he, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
E marth lar har jo, a Coweta Town chief, iv, 579
E marth lar yoholo, of Che haw Town, iv, 576
Emathla, Chief Charles, vi, 469
Embalming, by Oregon Indians, v, 693
  discussion by Swan, vi, 622–623
  methods, Indian, need for study of, iv, 663
Emerson, Judge, iv, 630
Emigrants, attacks on, described, ii, 134
  attack on, illustrated, ii, 133
  difficulties faced by, iv, 618
Emigration, of tribes, route of, iii, 477, 610
  of Whites, to the west, vi, 380
Emmet, T. A., iv, 504
Emmons, George Falconer, report of, on Oregon and California Indians, iii, 200
Emmons, Lt., reference to journey of, v, 101
Emory (Maj., Lt. Col., Col.), W. H., ii, 99
  pottery obtained by, iii, 83–84
  vocabulary transmitted by, iii, 404, 460
Emucfau, battle of, vi, 371–372, 379
E-nagh-magh language, Pueblos speaking, v, 689
Endurance, of Indians, discussion of, iv, 349
  trials of, v, 59–60
Eneeshur. *See* Eneshur.
E ne har e marth lar, chief at Hitch e tee, iv, 580
E ne har tuske he ne haw, chief at Tolowar thlocko, iv, 580
E ne har tus tun nuck ee, chief at Eu fau la, iv, 580
Eneshur (Eneshure), location, iii, 570
  population, iii, 570, 609; v, 706
Enetus, chief at Chetlessentan, vi, 702
England. *See* British Government.

England, Rev. J., human sacrifice witnessed by, v, 59
English, Indian relations with, v, 278; vi, 85–86, 89–93
English language, value of, in civilizing Indians, iii, 474–475
Enotochopco, a Hillabee village, vi, 371
  battle of, vi, 371–372
Ensenore, Chief, friend of the English, vi, 91
Ensign, Indian, of feathers, described, iii, 69
  illustrated, iii, 62, 68
Environment, customs affected by, v, 80
  influence of, ii, 47
  of Indian tribes, i, 133–188
Eokoros, doubt concerning existence of, i, 137
  See also Arikara.
Epidemics, on lower Columbia, i, 223
  See also Smallpox.
Episcopal Church, work among Indians. *See* Protestant Episcopal Church.
Equichonnonton, location, iv, 204
Erasmus, theory regarding Indians, v, 51
Eric the Red, iv, 119
Erickson, Lief, discoveries made by, vi, 742
Erie, derivation of name, iv, 382
Erie inscription, iii, 85–87
  illustration of, iii, 84
Erielhonons or Chats, iv, 207
  See also Eries.
Eries, vi, 35, 687
  account of, ii, 85–86; iii, 86
  at Siege of Detroit, ii, 301
  attitude of French toward, iii, 289
  called Cat Nation, vi, 148
  Catawbas identified as remnant of, iii, 405
  classification, ii, 343–344; v, 35–36
  conquered by Senecas, iv, 606
  disappearance, vi, 149
  driven off by Iroquois, iii, 196, 199
  early position, v, 122
  extermination, iv, 197, 198, 199, 202, 203; v, 647
  flight of remnant, iv, 203
  forts built by, v, 109
  government, iv, 198
Eries—Continued
  history, observations on, iii, 288–292
    sketch of, iv, 197–203
  identified as Catawbas, iii, 405; vi, 149
    as Neutral Nation, iv, 198, 203
  identity, discussion of, iv, 197, 382
  language, iv, 198
  migration traced by Lewis Evans, v, 37
  name, comments on, iii, 405; iv, 382
  neutrality, ii, 344; iv, 198
  opinion concerning retirement, iii, 406
  population. iv, 198
  territory occupied by, iii, 291–292; iv, 197–198
  war against. by Senecas, vi, 148
    by Wyandots and Iroquois, iv, 198
  war with, reference to, vi, 219
  wars of, account of, iv, 200–203
    with Iroquois, iii, 289–290; v, 137
  See also Cat tribe; Erigas.
Erigas, classification, v, 37
  Jefferson's name for the Eries, v, 35
  temporary stay in Ohio Valley, v, 41
  war waged on, by Five Nations, iv, 382
  See also Eries.
Ermitinger, Capt. Charles, Indian wife of, ii, 161
Erskines, location, vi, 710
  population, vi, 710
Escalante, Juan Bautista de, ruins examined by, iii, 301–302
Eshkibogikozhi, a Pillager chief, v, 189
Eshquagonabee's Band, census of, i, 458–467
Eskeloot. *See* Echeloot.
Eskimaux. *See* Eskimos.
Eskimos (Eskimaux, Esquimaux), iii, 558
  as occupants of Vinland, vi, 742
  boots of, described, iii, 66
    illustrated, iii, 65
  brief account of, ii, 28
  color of hair, ii, 322

Eskimos—Continued
  country inhabited by, IV, 559
  distinct from other tribes, V, 290
  linguistic family, III, 401
  map showing location, II, 28
  migration route, II, 28
  physical characteristics, V, 291
  warred on by Athapascas, V, 176
Eskini. *See* Erskines.
Esopus, derivation of name, III, 75
Esopus Indians, IV, 554
Esopus Landing, illustration of, III, 75
  inscription at, III, 74
Esquimaux. *See* Eskimos.
Essanapes, doubt concerning existence of, I, 137
Estedillo, Don José Antonio, II, 101
Estevan, travels and death of, IV, 23; VI, 69
Esther, Queen. *See* Queen Esther.
Estimates, Indian Office, explanation of, II, 559–560, 578–580
  of funds required, II, 565–580
Estufa, illustration showing, IV, 87
  use of, IV, 76, 87
Etchareottine. *See* Edchautawoot.
Etchemins (Etchemons), classification of, III, 401
  Milicite name for themselves, V, 674
  reference to language of, III, 512
  See also Amalecites; Malecite.
Etcheridiegottine. *See* Tsillawadoot.
Etchowee, Cherokee town, VI, 241
Eternity, Indian conception of, IV, 664
Ethiopian race, branches of, IV, 356–357
  civilization, IV, 357
  heads described, IV, 356
  See also Negro.
Ethnographical map of Indian tribes of 1600, II, 28
Ethnology, North American, discussion of study of, IV, 659–661, 662–667
  preliminary remarks on, IV, 655–659
  sciences embraced in, IV, 659
Ethrington, Maj., reference to, VI, 257
Etymology, comparative, fallacious deductions of, VI, 391
Etiquette of the Indians, IV, 342–345
Euchee (Eu chee), a Lower Creek town, IV, 578, 580; V, 262
Euchee language, a Muskogee dialect, I, 268
Euchees, V, 256
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  See also Uchees.
Eu fau la, a Lower Creek town, IV, 578, 580
  See also Ufala.
Eufollahs, Maj. Dade ambuscaded by, VI, 469
Euphorbia corollate, medicinal use of, I, 251
Euquachee, census of, V, 493
Euquatops, VI, 687
  and Muscaleros, population, VI, 708
  population, I, 518; VI, 687
  See also Mescaleors.
Eutahs of New Mexico, population, V, 498
  See also Utahs.
Eutaws, IV, 88
  See also Utahs.
Evans, Rev. James, translations by, IV, 535, 536
Evans, W. W., Peruvian burials investigated by, V, 657–658
Everett, Hon. Horace, report, on Indian Affairs, VI, 456
Ewbank, Thomas, VI, 610
  cited on Indian art, IV, 138
  paper by, IV, 438–456
Ewinte, a Utah division, VI, 697
  population of, VI, 697
  See also Uintea.
Exchange, medium of, I, 84–85
  See also Trade.
Executions, among the Creeks, I, 276
Ex e ni nuth, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census, V, 488
Exeter, former Indian name of, V, 228
Expedition, M'Kee's, through northwestern California, III, 99–177
Expedition, Schoolcraft's, to sources of the Mississippi, VI, 384–385, 448, 450, 451–452
Expedition, trading, account, by Perrault, III, 353–369
Explorations, French, in America, I, 134–137
  Pre-Columbian, I, 106–129
  Scandinavian, VI, 608
  Spanish, I, 133–134; II, 33–35
  See also Explorers.

- Explorers, attitude of, toward Indian antiquities, v, 109
  - early, dates of, i, 57–58
  - *See also* under names of, as Columbus, De Soto, etc.
- Eyank-ton-wah, a division of the Sioux nation, ii, 169
  - *See also* Yanktonai.
- Eyeish. *See* Aiches; Aliche.
- Eyes, effect of head flattening on, ii, 325, 326
  - of American Indians, ii, 323
  - of the Mandans, ii, 321

F

- Facial angle, Indian, compared with European, iv, 351
  - of American tribes, ii, 317, 331
  - of human race, variations in, iv, 360
  - *See also* Cranial measurements.
- Facial painting, Apache, v, 211
  - Cuchans, ii, 113
  - dancers', iv, 79
  - warriors', iv, 53, 63
- Factory system, abolition of, vi, 402
- Fair, Dr. Samuel, iv, 160
- Fairbanks, Mr., vocabulary by, ii, 216
- Fairfield, Presbyterian station at, iv, 589
- Fairies, belief in, v, 408; vi, 662
- Falbe, C. T., iii, 76
- Fall Indians, country occupied by, iii, 251
  - distinct from Sitkeas, iii, 252
  - identified as Minnetarees, iii, 251
  - mentioned as Atsinas, i, 437
  - population, iii, 251–252
- Fall River, Indians of, i, 287
- Fall River skeletons, iii, 88
  - discussions of, i, 127–129
- Falls of Montreal River, illustration of, iv, 187
- Falls of St. Anthony, illustration showing, vi, 384
  - Siouan name for, vi, 391
- Falls of the Ohio, description of, iii, 342
- Fallsmen, a synonym of Saulteurs, v, 144
- False Dungeness, Indians of, vi, 703
  - population, v, 491
- Falsehood, Indian attitude toward, ii, 196
- Family, Indian, average size of, iii, 95, 211, 238; vi, 562
  - discussion of, ii, 48–49
  - preservation of identity of, iii, 242
  - size affected by hardships, iv, 350
- Family life, description, ii, 63–65; iii, 63–64, 235–237
  - of the Kenistenos, v, 166
  - unhappiness in, iii, 480
  - *See also* Children; Labor; Marriage customs; Polygamy.
- Famine, attitude toward, ii, 64, 77
- Farmer's Brother, iv, 345, 563
  - at Canandaigua council, vi, 326
  - present at conference, v, 667
- Färoe Islands, explorers' visits to, vi, 742
- Fasting, among the Dacotahs, iii, 227
  - legend concerning, ii, 229
  - object of, i, 113; v, 196
  - puberty custom, v, 196; vi, 633
  - religious ceremony of, vi, 660
- Feasts, at puberty dance, v, 215
  - celebrated by Osage, iv, 274–275
  - conduct at, ii, 75
  - customs connected with, iii, 227; v, 168–171
  - eating contest at, iii, 227
  - for juveniles, ii, 76
  - Giant, iii, 487–488; iv, 64
  - Iroquois, iii, 187
  - of dog's flesh, iii, 187, 287
  - of Mondamin, illustrated, vi, 385
  - of the New Corn, iii, 227
  - rabbit, ceremonial, iv, 78
  - to open hunting season, iii, 61
  - Winnebago initiation, iii, 287
- Feathers, eagle, ensign of, described, iii, 69
  - ensign of, illustrated, iii, 62, 68
  - headdresses of, illustrated, iii, 68
  - significance, iv, 53
  - symbolism, ii, 57–58
    - illustrated, vi, 568
  - value, ii, 57
  - won in conflicts, ii, 159
  - worn as war honors, ii, 178–179
  - worn only by warriors, iv, 58
- Featherstonhaugh, criticism of, ii, 99
- Featherwork of California Indians, v, 649–650

Fecundity, affected by hardships, IV, 350
Feliz, Fernando, ranch of, III, 105
Ferguson, Maj., death of, VI, 336
Feuds, cause of, between clans, II, 171
  effect of, II, 172
Fevers, treatment for, IV, 511
Ficklin, Joseph, letter by, I, 300–301
Field, D. D., patriotic efforts of, V, 595
Fighting men. *See* Warriors.
Figurines from Tennessee caves or mounds, IV, 140
Financial statements of Indian Office, II, 561–564
Finley, James, fur trade of, VI, 269
Fire, as a symbol of deity, I, 30–31
  ceremonies, V, 65–66
  making, I, 214; II, 138; III, 228, 465–466
    illustrated, III, 228
  new, kindled for feasts, III, 228
  newly made for ceremony, V, 66
  on newly made graves, V, 64
  sacred character of, V, 64–65
  use in shaping wood, I, 75–76
  used in mining, I, 97, 99
  See also Fire, perpetual; Fire, sacred; Fire worship.
Fire, perpetual, edifice devoted to, V, 68
  of Natchez, VI, 593, 627
  of "Pecas," mentioned, IV, 40
  symbolism discussed, II, 138; V, 67–68
  tradition on Lake Superior, V, 68–69
Fire, sacred, an evidence of sun worship, V, 63–64
  belief concerning, IV, 86
  lighting, I, 31
  of the Pueblos, IV, 76
  procurement, V, 65
Fire Indians (Fire Nation), a name for the Mascoutins, IV, 206, 244; V, 191
  See also Little Prairie Indians.
Fire Nation. *See* Fire Indians.
Fire worship, found among the Natchez, VI, 197
  general discussion of, V, 63–68
  Indian origin indicated by, V, 67
  of oriental nations, V, 406
  wide extent of, V, 104
  See also Fire, perpetual; Fire, sacred.
Firearms, effect of introduction, I, 280; V, 123
  first use by aborigines, II, 73–74
Fire hunting, described, II, 53–54
Fire-makers, a name for the Pottawattomies, V, 145
Fish, curing of, III, 219; IV, 57, 68
  of the Minnesota lakes, I, 187
  spearing, II, 51, 53
    illustrated, II, 53
  See also Fishing.
Fish, Rev. P., IV, 585
Fish Carrier, Chief, at conference, V, 667
  land granted to, VI, 324
Fish dam, construction of, III, 146
Fish dance, IV, 64
Fisher, Sergeant, killed by Indians, II, 253–254
Fishhooks, described, III, 468
  illustrated, II, 86; III, 468
  use, II, 53
Fishing, advantages of New England tribes in, V, 223–224
  charm used in, VI, 635
  methods used in, II, 51–53; III, 214; IV, 61
Fishing customs, Chippewyan, V, 175, 177
  illustration showing, VI, 507
  See also Fishing.
Fishing places, of the Pennacooks, V, 223, 224, 225
Fish-nets, Shoshonee, described, I, 213–214
Fish-Pond Town, a Creek town, IV, 576, 578
  chief of, IV, 576
Fish spear, Shoshonee, described, I, 213
  illustrated, I, 211
Fitch, Rev. Mr., missionary work of, VI, 734
Fitzpatrick, Thomas, I, 259
  extracts from letters of, I, 260
  Plains tribes described by, I, 259–264
Five Nations, I, 197
  additions to, III, 198–199
  attack on Montreal, III, 519
  called Massawamack, V, 36
  called the Long House, V, 645
  character, III, 186
  customs, I, 335

Five Nations—Continued
  divisions and subdivisions, III, 184
  early enmity among, V, 107, 110
  government, III, 184–185
  joined by the Tuscaroras, III, 186; VI, 186
  legend of league of, V, 157–163
  legend of origin, V, 636–646
  location, II, 36
  tribes composing, III, 184, 401, 590
  See also Six Nations.
Flags, placed at graves, IV, 55
Flatbows, and Cootenays, population of, VI, 700
  classification, III, 402
  location, I, 437
  See also Cootenays.
Flatheads, VI, 687, 695
  census, VI, 556
  classification, III, 402
  embalming practiced by, V, 693
  enemies of Blackfeet, V, 181
  hunting ground, VI, 698
  illustrations of skull of, II, 332, 334
  location, VI, 556
    map showing, III, 96, 200
  marriage customs, V, 654
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 735, 739
  nature of lands, V, 656
  physical characteristics, V, 656
  population, V, 705, 706, 707; VI, 687, 695, 700, 701
  trader's name for Choctaw, II, 324
  See also Salish.
Flat-Mouth, Chief, II, 98; V, 426, 427
  peace made by, V, 187
  Pillager chief, II, 159; V, 189
  war-party led by, V, 186
  See also Aishkibugikozh.
Flat River Band, census of, I, 478–487
Flattery Indians, location, IV, 598
  population, IV, 598
Fleming, Col., death of, VI, 266
Fleming, Rev. John, statement of regarding tribes, VI, 517
  translation by, IV, 546
Fleshing tools, described, I, 91–92
  illustrated, I, 77; III, 467; VI, 603
Fletcher, Jonathan C., acknowledgment to, III, 375
  Indian census transmitted by, II. 222
  report by, III, 284–288; VI, 691, 704
  vocabulary transmitted by, II, 214
  Winnebago agent, III, 283
  Winnebagoes described by, IV, 51–59, 227–243
Flint River, brief description of, V, 256
Flint stones, story of origin of, I, 317
Flood. *See* Deluge.
Flores Creek, Indians of, VI, 702
Florida, accessible to Mexican tribes, V, 95
  advantages found in, by Indians, VI, 472
  De Soto's expedition to, VI, 58–64
  explorations in, II, 20–21; VI, 38
  extent of country called, VI, 40
  Indian lands in, III, 584, 586; V, 480
  Indian population of, I, 522, 533; III, 584, 586; V, 480, 481
  mounds of, discussed, III, 77–78
  population and area of, IV, 610
  pottery from coast of, III, 77–82
  tribes, I, 522
Florida Indians, annuities paid to, VI, 723
  funds required for, II, 568
  lands, ceded by, II, 603
    purchased from, II, 599
    statistics on, II, 497
  plan regarding colonization, VI, 411–412
  physical and mental character, II, 32
  removal, VI, 497
Floridians, application of the term, VI, 47
Floyd, Brig. Gen. John, battle of, with Creeks, VI, 367
  Creeks defeated by, VI, 362
Flute or pipe, described, II, 514; IV, 71
  illustrated, II, 514
Fluviatile drift, action of, I, 166
Folle Avoines (Folsavoins), III, 556
  country occupied by, III, 559
  name for the Menomonees, VI, 271, 687

Folle Avoines (Folsavoins)—Continued
    population, vi, 271
    totems, iii, 556
    warriors, estimates of, iii, 556, 559
    See also Menominee.
Follett, F., i, 92
Folsavoins. *See* Folle Avoines.
Folsom, Col. David, salt works of, vi, 526
Folsom, George, petition signed by, iii, 618
Fonda, death of, vi, 313
Fond du Lac, treaty made at, vi, 422
Font, Fr. Pedro, extract from diary of, iii, 299–301
Food, buried with the dead, v, 93
    customs concerning, ii, 64, 132
    horses used for, ii, 133
    of Atlantic coast tribes, v, 80
    of Bonacks, v, 216
    of California Indians, v, 80, 649; vi, 710
    of Chippewa, v, 150
    of Chippewyans, v, 175
    of Congarees, iv, 157
    of Creeks, v, 274
    of Dacotahs, iv, 67–68
    of Digger Indians, i, 221; v, 199
    of hunter tribes, vi, 553
    of Massachusetts Indians, i, 284–285
    of Navajo, iv, 212, 214
    of Oregon tribes, v, 80, 656
    of prairie tribes, v, 80
    of Rocky Mountain tribe, v, 80
    of Root-Diggers, iv, 222
    of Shoshonee, i, 211, 217
    of Snake Indians, i, 221
    of Wee-yots, iii, 127–128
    offered to the dead, i, 38–39, 83–84; v, 79–80
    Oregon and California tribes, iii, 218–219
    overindulgence in, iii, 226
    physical development affected by, v, 656
    preparation, by Winnebagoes, iv, 57
    quest for, ii, 75–77
    taboos concerning, v, 215
    wild olive used for, iii, 114
    See also Agriculture; Cooking; Corn; Famine; Feasts; Fish; Game; Hunting, etc.
Fooskahatche, derivation of name, iv, 380
Forbes, Gen., Fort Duquesne taken by, vi, 226–227
Force, Peter, iv, 127
    acknowledgment to, iii, 74
Foreman, Rev. Stephen, assistance rendered by, ii, 443
    report by, iv, 589
Forrey, Dr. Samuel, article by, on racial characteristics, iv, 354
    brief biography of, iv, 353
    reference to views of, v, 288
Fort Alabama, assault on, by De Soto, vi, 62
Fort Anne, vi, 208
Fort Bourbon, vi, 269
Fort Brady, location, vi, 397
Fort Brooke, ambuscade of troops from, vi, 469
Fort Cadarackui, v, 522
Fort Caroline, erection of, vi, 75
    taken by Spaniards, vi, 77
Fort Cataraqui, vi, 198
Fort Charles, erection of, vi, 73
Fort Chartres, vi, 237
    military and civil capital of Illinois, iv, 266
    Pontiac's visit to, ii, 307
    trading station at, vi, 269
Fort Crevecoeur, early French post, v, 192
Fort Cumberland, vi, 208
Fort Dayton, vi, 290
Fort Dearborn in 1820, illustration showing, iv, 193
Fort Defiance, erection of, vi, 340
    establishment, iv, 210
    illustration of, iv, 210
    influence, among Navajoes, iv, 215
Fort Detroit, vi, 256
    aid sent to, vi, 250–251
    brief account of siege of, ii, 241
    details of siege, by Pontiac, ii, 242–308
    tribes dwelling near, vi, 714
    See also Detroit.
Fort Duquesne, a resort for Indians, vi, 215
    establishment, v, 109; vi, 197, 214
    reduction, vi, 226–227
    tribes in vicinity of, vi, 132
Fort Edward, vi, 208, 220

Fort Erie, III, 334
Fort Frontenac, III, 334
  capture by Bradstreet, VI, 226
Fort Gibson, VI, 502
Fort Granby, IV, 162
Fort Hall, I, 205, 209, 211
  date of, I, 206
  Indians in region of, V, 198
  erection of, on Snake River, I, 203
Fort Hamilton, erection of, VI, 336
Fort Harmer, council held at, VI, 323
  erection of, VI, 597
  treaty concluded at, VI, 330
Fort Harrison, investment of, VI, 359
Fort Hill (New York), description of, IV, 173–174; V, 666–667
  illustration of, IV, 174
Fort Hill (Ohio), earthworks on, described, V, 661–662
Fort Jackson, treaty signed at, VI, 380
Fort Jefferson, building of, VI, 336
Fort Kienuka, VI, 182
Fort King, VI, 469, 470
Fort Laramie, annuities to treaty signers at, VI, 723
Fort La Tour, brief account of, V, 674–675
Fort Laurens, VI, 302
  erection of, VI, 301, 302, 304
  siege by Indians, VI, 304–305
Fort Le Nou, location of, VI, 198
Fort London (Loudon), erection of, VI, 208
Fort Loudon, surrender of, to Indians, VI, 241, 287
Fort M'Intosh, erection of, VI, 301, 302
  origin of, V, 140
  treaty concluded at, VI, 327, 330
Fort Mackinac (Mackanack), ruins of, illustrated, II, 242; VI, 243
  taken by Indians, II, 148
  See also Fort Michilimackinac.
Fort M'Laughlin, tribes frequenting, V, 487, 488
Fort Madaline, VI, 198
Fort Madison, siege of, by Indians, VI, 359
Fort Malden, rendezvous at, VI, 358
Fort Mandan, establishment of, III, 249
Fort Matheo, capture by the French, VI, 80
Fort Maumee, change of garrison at, VI, 344
  hostilities ended by victory of, VI, 342, 344
  reference to taking of, IV, 614
  Wayne's arrival at, VI, 341
Fort Meigs, VI, 362, 363
Fort Michilimackinac, attack on, by Indians, VI, 243
  English defeated by Saulteurs at, II, 284
  Lake Huron protected by, VI, 198
  massacre at, II, 241
  remains of, V, 110
  reoccupation of, VI, 256
  See also Fort Mackinac.
Fort Mimms, capture of, by Indians, VI, 365–366
  liberation of captives taken at, VI, 374
Fort Necessity, surrender of Washington at, VI, 215
Fort Niagara, VI, 198
  British Indian Department at, VI, 297
  change of garrison, VI, 344
  date of building, V, 648
  description, III, 334
  founding, VI, 196
  Indian activities at, VI, 251, 278, 283, 297
  remains, V, 110
  surrender, VI, 234
Fort Ninety-Six, VI, 238
  Indian attack on, VI, 239
Fort Oswego, VI, 198
  ancient name of, VI, 197
  founding, VI, 196–197
Fort Pitt, Indian hostilities at, VI, 249–250
  invested by Indians, VI, 242
  locality, described, III, 339
  naming, VI, 227
  sketch of, III, 336
  trading post at, VI, 269
Fort Ponchartrain, now site of Detroit, V, 648
Fort Presque Isle, VI, 237
Fort Prince George, Indian attack on, VI, 239–240
  location, VI, 238, 239

Fort Recovery, besieged by Indians, vi, 339
  location, vi, 339
Fort St. Joseph, Lake Huron protected by, vi, 198
Fort St. Joseph's, tribes dwelling near, vi, 714
Fort St. Mary's, vi, 198
Fort Sandusky, taken by the Hurons, ii, 273
Fort Shelby, taken by British, vi, 358
Fort Simpson, tribes trading at, v, 487, 489
Fort Slucher, iii, 334
Fort Smith, vi, 527, 528
Fort Stanwix, vi, 208, 283
  established in Oneida country, v, 512
  fraud charged in treaty at, v, 667–668
  investment, by British, vi, 285–289
  reference to seizure of, v, 514
  termination of siege of, vi, 290–291
  treaty concluded at, vi, 323, 324, 330
Fort Stoddart, location, iv, 629
Fort Sullivan, location, v, 667
Fort Venango, iv, 614
Fort Village Band, census of, i, 478–487
Fort Vincennes, vi, 237
Fort Washington, St. Clair's army at, vi, 336
Fort Wayne, vi, 397
Fort William Henry, vi, 208
  capture by French and Indians, vi, 221–222
  erection, vi, 220
Fort Wyoming, massacre at, vi, 297–298
Fortifications, areas containing, i, 47, 48
  attributed to De Soto, vi, 66
  built by Indians, iv, 124
  built by Pequots, vi, 119
  Cumberland Gap, iv, 134–135
  described in Smithsonian publication, i, 48
  entrances to, illustrated, i, 48
  erected by Yakamas, vi, 613
  explained by traditions, iv, 135, 136–137
  explanation of ditches inside, vi, 163
  in Pennsylvania, iv, 326
Fortifications—Continued
  in the Natchez country, v, 283
  Indian mode of building, vi, 603
  mentioned in Iowa song, iii, 264, 267
  Mississippi Valley, conclusions drawn from, v, 61
  number questioned, iv, 144–145
  of Mississippi Valley tribes, vi, 600–601
  of villages, v, 116
  on Columbia River, iii, 206
  on Rock River, possibly Winnebago, iii, 278
  plan, iv, 126–127
  purpose, iv, 110
  ruins in Ohio, v, 660
  skill shown in, v, 114
  Susquehanna, age of, iv, 174
  Teton, map of, v, 100
  time of erection, i, 267
  western, type of, iv, 667
  See also Earthworks; Forts; Mounds.
Forts, commanding the Great Lakes, vi, 198
  English, taken by Indians, vi, 243
  erected for English defense, vi, 208
  necessity for, i, 246
Fose hatch ee e marth lar, chief at Eufaula, iv, 580
Foster, J. W., antiquities exhibited by, iv, 138
Foster, W. A., crania received from, ii, 326, 329
Fox Indians. *See* Foxes.
Fox language, an Algonquian dialect, ii, 341
Fox River, settlement of Stockbridges on, vi, 504
  tribes living on, v, 524; vi, 385
Foxes, iii, 554
  annuities of, ii, 585
  classification, iii, 401
  country occupied by, iii, 593
  driven from rice-lake region, v, 525
  enemies of the French, vi, 237
  independence in warfare, vi, 200
  language spoken by, iii, 562
  leading men of, iii, 568
  Ojibwa women captured by, ii, 141
  other names for, ii, 136; iii, 562; v, 39, 41

Foxes—Continued
  population of, III, 259, 562, 593, 609; VI, 271
  relations of, with the Chippewas, V, 524–525
  relations of, with the Mascoutins, IV, 245
  territory occupied by, V, 524
  totems of, III, 554
  trade of, III, 564
  trading post for, III, 566
  treaty made by, VI, 255, 380, 421
  tribal relations of, III, 566
  villages, number of, III, 562
  war of, with Ojibwas, II, 142, 150
  warriors, number of, III, 554, 562; VI, 271
  See also Mechecaukis; Musquakeys; Odagumaig; Outagamies; Sacs and Foxes; Sauks and Foxes.
Fractures, treatment for, IV, 514
France, explorations in service of, VI, 40–43, 48–57
  See also French.
Franciscans, Spanish, missionary work of, VI, 734, 735
  statistical data on missions of, VI, 735
Franklin, Dr. B., remarks by, on Indians, IV, 342–345
Franklin, Michael, relations of, with the Milicites, V, 675–676
  treaty conducted by, V, 675, 677
Frazer, Jack, mention of, IV, 97, 98
Freeland's fort, battle at, VI, 307
Fremont, Col., among the Shoshonee, I, 200
  geographical memoir of, discussed, I, 152–154
  mention of expedition of, VI, 519
  reference to, III, 493; IV, 597; V, 100
  reference to explorations of, IV, 551
French, the, Algonquin name for, I, 18
  attempt by, to take Indian census, V, 479
  colonial policy of, VI, 185, 199–201, 206–208
  efforts to acquire territory, V, 109–110
  explorations, V, 646–648
French, the, Algonquin name for—Con.
  Indian attitude toward, VI, 156
  influence among Indian tribes, VI, 191–192, 197–198, 223
  intermarriage with Indians, V, 529
  loss of Canada by, V, 528
  name given by Chippewas, V, 147
  policy in America, VI, 185
  relations with Indians, IV, 614; V, 278
  relations with the Natchez, VI, 628
  See also France; French and Indian Wars; French explorations.
French and Indian Wars, beginning of, VI, 249
  duration, V, 528
French explorations, antiquities in area of, V, 108–110
  area of, I, 196–197
  object, II, 20
Fresno Indians (Fresnos), VI, 687
  population, IV, 608; V, 484; VI, 687
Fresno Reservation, population, VI, 715
  report on, VI, 716
Frezzie, Chief, I, 142
Friend, Mr., IV, 314
Friendship, Cherokee song of, V, 564
  gestures indicating, II, 22
Frit, Samuel, IV, 556
Frobisher, Joseph, VI, 269
Frontenac, Count de (Gov. Gen.), I, 334; V, 671; VI, 185, 190
  pictographic drawing of army of, VI, 605
Fuegians, physical characteristics, II, 316
Fuller, William, signer of Indian treaty, VI, 144
Fuller's earth, large deposit of, I, 221
Funeral dance, brief account of, III, 286
Funeral vase (urn), Aztec, description of, VI, 589
  Aztec, illustration of, VI, 576
  theory of age, IV, 163
  use and description, IV, 162–163
Fur trade, beginning, in Canada, V, 647
  central point of, I, 187
  French and English rivalry in, V, 522
  letter giving information on, III, 599–600

Fur trade—Continued
statistics concerning, III, 604–606; VI, 726–730
under the English, VI, 268–269
See also Trade, Indian.
Fur traders, licensed, list of, III, 604–606
See also Traders.
Furs, influence of market for, I, 434
prices of, III, 354; IV, 276
relative values of, II, 178; III, 366; IV, 276
use for clothing, V, 80
See also Fur trade; Skins; Trade.
Fus hatch che micco of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Fus hatch fixico of Che haw Town, IV, 576
Future life, Indian conception of, V, 403
Indian beliefs concerning, IV, 638
See also Immortality; Soul.

G

Gabimubeeno, a Pillager subchief, V, 189
Gage, Gen., Bradstreet censured by, VI, 256
plan accomplished by, VI, 259
Gahlinskun. *See* A se guang.
Gaillard, John, letter to, regarding Indian lands, II, 581
Gaines, Gen., IV, 629; VI, 476
Gaines, George S., IV, 632
Gaines, Lt. Edmund P., IV, 629, 630
Gaiuckers, a name for Cayugas, IV, 332, 333
Galena, deposits of, I, 152
Galibio Indians, possible descendants of, V, 28
Galissonière, Marquis de la, V, 109
Galisteo, Indian name of, III, 298
language spoken at, III, 298
Gallatin, Albert, I, 21; II, 328, 343, 348; III, 252; VI, 605, 646
chronological tables prepared by, V, 96–97
letter to Indian Commissioner, III, 397–400
petition signed by, III, 618
use of vocabularies by, II, 358
vocabularies collected by, III, 398
Gallinazo-stone, mirrors made of, V, 91–92
Gallinomero. *See* Kai-na-méah.
Galphins, VI, 351
Gambling, at games, II, 74, 78; IV, 64
Game, abundance of, on Grand River, I, 219
destruction, I, 223; II, 192; III, 272
division among hunters, I, 278; II, 131, 185
in Columbia River region, I, 221
in Minnesota, I, 187–188
in the Oregon region, V, 656
influence, on Indian migration, III, 258
of the Athapascan country, V, 178
of the Ojibwa country, II, 137
of the Pillagers' country, V, 191
of the Sioux country, II, 174
range of, I, 433–434
result of extinction of, II, 187–188, 550; III, 208; VI, 565
scarcity of, in Shoshonean country, I, 206–207
varieties of, in the buffalo country, IV, 101, 107
wanton slaughter of, by Indians, IV, 96
See also Hunting; and under names of animals, as Antelope, Bear, Buffalo, etc.
Games, I, 82–83
ball, described, II, 78
illustrated, II, 75
bowl, described, II, 72–74
illustrated, II, 73
bullet, or button, II, 133
moccasin, described, IV, 64–65
of chance, with sticks, III, 217
of the Creeks, V, 277
of the Dacotahs, IV, 64–65
of the Navajo, IV, 214
played on ice, illustrated, II, 75
played on snow, II, 516
plum-stones, described, II, 71–72
illustrated, II, 73
Ganawese, VI, 140
Gandastogué, a synonym of Andastes (q. v.), VI, 137, 138
Gandongarae, tribes living at, IV, 208
Gangasco. *See* Gingaskins.
Gansevoort, Capt., reference to journal of, V, 670
Gansevoort, Col., Fort Stanwix defended by, VI, 285–286

Garangula (Garragula, Garrangula), III, 22, 57; V, 121
  Onondago orator, V, 163
  oratory of, IV, 627; V, 518
Garay, Francis, grant received by, III, 27; VI, 44
Garces, Francisco, extract from diary of, III, 297–299
Garcilaso de la Vega, observations made by, III, 328
Garden beds, age of, I, 57–58
  attributed to Mushkodains, I, 307
  connection with mounds, I, 60
  date of abandonment, IV, 130
  extent, I, 55
  remains, I, 54–60
  theories concerning, V, 396
Gardener's Canal, tribes residing on, V, 487
Garoteros, possible origin of, V, 203, 689
  See also Yumas.
Garragula, Garrangula. *See* Garangula.
Garter, construction and illustration of, III, 68
Gaspe Indians, brief account of, VI, 53–54
  language, VI, 54
  See also Micmacs.
Gates, Sir Thomas, VI, 96
Gauntlet, ordeal of, custom of Five Nations, III, 188–189
  practices at Fort Niagara, VI, 297
Gauranos, settlement founded by, IV, 556
Gawagensea, IV, 203
Gay Head, Indians of, I, 287
Gazlay, Jonathan, V, 668
Gegosasa (Gegosaseh, Jegasaga), meaning of name, IV, 202
  queen of the Eries, IV, 198
  tradition concerning, IV, 204
  See also Yagowanea.
Gel Plat, Pillager chief, episode in life of, II, 67
  See also Guel Plat.
Generic families, I, 196–198; II, 33–38
  See also Linguistic stocks.
Genesee country, geography of, I, 163–165
Geneva, N. Y., Indian name of, IV, 384; VI, 310
Gengis Khan, V, 61
Genii worship among Indian tribes, III, 492
Gens de Terre (Gens des Terres), also called Nopemings, V, 41, 145
  country occupied by, I, 41; III, 553; V, 145
  food of, reference to, I, 41
  warriors of, III, 553
  See also Têtes de Boule.
Gentoo. *See* Hindoo race.
Geographical features, mentioned in traditions, III, 270
Geographical names. *See* Names, geographical.
Geography, physical, Indian knowledge of, III, 270
  of Indian country, III, 91–177
  of Minnesota, I, 181–188
Geological action of the North American lakes, I, 166–172
Geological Survey of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa, reports on, IV, 189
Geology, of Minnesota, I, 186
  of western New York, I, 163–165
Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee, number of Indians in, V, 480
Georgia, Indian lands in, III, 584, 586; IV, 460
  Indian population of, III, 584, 586
  map of, with parts of other states, V, 253
  population and area, IV, 610
  pottery from, III, 79
Georgia colony, establishment of, VI, 186
Georgianna, the sloop, wreck of, IV, 601
German Flatts, reference to Indian attack on, VI, 298
Germanic tribes, name for themselves, VI, 177
Gesenius, quoted on languages, II, 342
Gestures indicating friendship, II, 22
Geudeville, travels of, I, 136
Ghebir system, VI, 197
Ghent, treaty of, III, 279, 280
  effect on Indians, V, 450
  unsatisfactory to Indians, IV, 259
Giant dance, and feast, described, III, 487–488
  description, IV, 64
Giants, cannibal, belief in, V, 408
  fabled, belief in, III, 233; VI, 662
  no evidence of, II, 318

Gibbes, Robert W., mention of collection of, iv, 162, 163
Gibbles, Dr. R. W., skull measured by, iv, 168
Gibbs, George, California tribes described by, v, 217 -129
  diary kept by, of M'Kee expedition, iii, 99–177
  letters to H. R. Schoolcraft, v, 662–665
  opinion of, cited, iii, 88; vi, 612
  paper by, on California languages, iii, 420
  vocabularies collected by, iii, 405
Gibbs & Co., v, 662
Gibbs, Wolcott, v, 662
Gibson, Col., iv, 136
  Logan's speech delivered by, iv, 626
Gibson, John B., measurements of hair, iii, 383
Gila Apaches (Gilenos), an Apache division, iv, 216
  chief, v, 206
  dialect, v, 203
  range, v, 206, 207
Gila River, account of Pimos of, iii, 296–306
  alleged origin of name, iii, 83
  description, iii, 304
  reached by Coronado, vi, 70
  Yuma name for, ii, 113, 114
Gila Valley, Apaches in, v, 203, 206
Gilands, brief description of, iii, 83
  See also Coyoteros.
Gilbert, H. C., census report by, vi, 692
Gilbert, Sir Humphrey, reference to expedition of, vi, 82, 103
Gilenos. *See* Gila Apaches.
Gilless, Lt., mounds opened by, v, 93
Gillett, R., population report by, vi, 707
Gillis, Mr., letter to, on Peruvian burials, v, 658–660
Gilmer, Gov., Scott's letter to, on Cherokee removal, vi, 493–494
Gingaskins, a part of the Accomacs, v, 36
Girdle, description and illustration of, iii, 86
Girls. *See* Children.
Girty, action taken by, in Revolutionary War, vi, 300
Gist, Washington joined by, vi, 213
Gitchey Wedau, son of Sagima, vi, 202
Gitchy Kenabec, the mythological serpent, i, 94
Gitchy Naigow, Chief, story concerning, iv, 48–49
Gitshe Iawba, feat of, ii, 54–55
Gladwin, Mr., ii, 256, 258, 262, 279
  commander of Fort Detroit, ii, 242, 250
Gladwyn, Major, vi, 253
  at siege of Fort Detroit, vi, 244
  resistance to Indian siege, iv, 614
Glen, Gov., iii, 294
Gliuna, ancient name of Fort Oswego, vi, 197
Gnadenhutten, massacre of Indians of, vi, 317–318
Goadby, Dr., iv, 138
God. *See* Deity; Gods.
Godfroy, Jacques, negotiations with Indians, ii, 256, 257
Gods and goddesses, Minnesota tribes, iv, 495–496
  Dacotah, iii, 232, 485–487
    illustrated, iii, 485
    multiplicity of, iv, 642–643
  duality in Indian belief, iv, 636; v, 407–408
  minor, or spirits, belief in, iv, 636
  of the Dakota, iv, 644
  of the Iroquois, i, 316
  See also Culture heroes; Deities.
Gofer, belief concerning, v, 259
  description, v, 258
Gogouins, iii, 555
  totems, iii, 555
  warriors, number of, iii, 555
  See also Cayugas.
Gold, and silver, barter in, iv, 165
  articles made of, illustrated, iv, 448
  discovery, in California, i, 149
  ornaments, iv, 450
  place, in Indian regard, i, 93
  rocks bearing, iv, 171
  Spanish search for, iii, 25, 27, 30, 36, 40, 41, 44
  specimens of, described, i, 149–150
  See also Gold deposits; Gold mines; Gold mining.
Gold Bluff, origin of gold found at, iii, 138

Gold deposits, character of, in California, I, 154
  of California, I, 149–156
  source of, I, 155
  value and extent of, I, 152–155
  See also Gold; Gold mines.
Gold formation of the South, range of, IV, 170–171
Gold mines, ancient, I, 151
  annual production of, I, 151
  classes, described, IV, 171
  South American, I, 151
  See also Gold deposits; Gold mining.
Gold mining, ancient, described, IV, 451
  methods employed in, III, 148
  on Scott's River, III, 159
Goldsmiths, art of, IV, 447–453
Gomez de la Cortina, Don, acknowledgment to, II, 330
Gonorrhea, among the Creeks, V, 271
  remedy for, IV, 515
Good Road Band (Goodrod's Band), a Medawakanton band, III, 613
  census, I, 498–507
  listed as one of Seven Fires, II, 169
Goodrod's Band. *See* Good Road Band.
Good Thunder's Band, census of, I, 498–507
Good Water, Choctaw education at, IV, 585
Goodwin, Dr., I, 107
Gookin, cited on Passaconnaway, V, 229
Goose Creek, tribes of, V, 201
Gordon, Lt. Gov. Patrick, VI, 140
Gorgets, shell, V, 110
  described, I, 78–79
  illustrated, I, 103
Gorman, Rev. Sam'l, V, 689
Goshenink, etymology of name, IV, 540
Goslin, death of, II, 254
Gosnold, Bartholomew, discoveries of, VI, 95
  expedition organized by, VI, 96
Gouge, stone, illustration of, IV, 175
Gouin, M., English warned by, at Fort Detroit, II, 257
Gourgues, Chevalier Dominico, expedition led by, VI, 78–81
  outrages avenged by, VI, 744
Government, absence among tribes, I, 262
  Choctaw and Chickasaw, I, 312
  Indian attitude toward, II, 183
  new Indian, I, 282
  of Indian tribes, IV, 477–483; VI, 570
  of New England tribes, VI, 114–115
  of the Pillagers, V, 189
  patriarchal form of, I, 193
  See also Chiefs; Councils; Social organization; U. S. Government.
Graffenreidt, Baron de, III, 294
Grafton, Indians at, I, 287
Grammatical notes on Massachusetts language, I, 295, 296, 297, 298–299
Grammatical structure of the Algonquin language, II, 351–442
Granaries, Apache, discovered by Spaniards, III, 304
Grand Island of Lake Superior, census of Indians of, I, 458–467
Grand Medicine Dance. *See* Medicine Dance.
Grand Pawnees, a Pawnee band, III, 595
  location, III, 595
Gran(d) Quivera. *See* Quivera.
Grand Rapids Band, census of, I, 478–487
Grand River Valley, description, I, 218–219
  tribes of, VI, 206, 385
Grand Traverse Bay, tribe on shore of, VI, 385
Grandes Eaux, estimate of warriors of, III, 557, 559
Grandfather, ceremonial use of word, IV, 643
Grandmother, ceremonial use of word, IV, 643
Granganameo, relations with the English, VI, 83, 86, 89
Grangula. *See* Garangula.
Grant, Col., march of, against the Cherokees, VI, 241
  slaughter of troops under, VI, 226
Grant, James, III, 355
Grant, Maj., reference to defeat of, VI, 249
Grasshoppers, as food, V, 649
Grater, mandioca, described, IV, 445
Grave Creek, naming of, VI, 597

Grave Creek Flats, maize cultivated on, iv, 130
  map of, i, 123
  mounds on, i, 123; ii, 85
Grave Creek Mound, iv, 128
  artifacts from, i, 89–90, 91, 93
  conclusions drawn from, iv, 129–130
  copper articles in, i, 67
  illustration of antiquities from, vi, 610
  illustration of section of, i, 120
  inscribed stone from, vi, 610
  inscription from, compared with Phoenician, vi, 611
  pipe from, illustrated, i, 75
  view from, illustrated, vi, 312
Grave-posts, description of, i, 356–357; iv, 55
  illustrated, i, 356
  inscriptions on, i, 334; vi, 606
  of the Dacotahs, iv, 66
  symbolism of devices on, ii, 199
Graverott, M., iii, 355
Graves, California Indian, described, iii, 140
  Chippewa, illustration of, v, 64
  Congaree, description, iv, 160
  Dacotah, description, iv, 65
  decoration of, iii, 175; vi, 613
  European articles in, iv, 140–141
  lights burned on, vi, 664–665
    illustration of, vi, 664
  marked by stone heaps, ii, 69
  object of fires at, iv, 55
  object of orientation of, iv, 54
  pipes recovered from, i, 75
  pottery in, i, 83–84
  roof built over, iv, 55
  temporary use of, iv, 156
  Winnebago, described, iv, 54, 55
  See also Burials; Grave-posts; Tomb.
Gravier, vi, 734
Gray's Harbor, Indians of, vi, 703
Grayson, George, land assigned to, iv, 581
Great and Little Osage, land ceded by, ii, 603
  purchased from, ii, 594, 595, 598, 599
  statistics on, ii, 605
  See also Great Osage; Little Osage.
Great Hare, in Indian mythology, i, 18; iii, 514
Greathouse, connection with Logan massacre, iii, 56; iv, 623, 629
Great Lakes region, aborigines of, iv, 187–188
  description, iv, 185–194
  French possession of, vi, 198
Great Nemaha agency, iv, 466
Great Osages, an Osage band, iii, 594
  annuities of, ii, 585
  See also Great and Little Osage.
Great Snake of Canandaigua Lake, tale of, iii, 322–323
Great Spirit, Dakota use of term, vi, 649
Greeks, mythology of, v, 406–407
Green Bay, Algonquin name for, iv, 560
  change of garrison at, vi, 344
  Indians in vicinity of, vi, 204
  inscription on cliffs of, i, 414
  seat of the Winnebagoes, vi, 34
  tribes on, vi, 206
Green Bay region, Indian population of, vi, 271
Green Corn ceremony, an annual sacrifice, v, 267
  illustration of, vi, 385
  of the Dakotah, vi, 385
Green Corn dance, a thanksgiving feast, iii, 89
  description, v, 685
  metal plates exhibited at, iii, 89
Greenland, classification of language of, iii, 401
  settlement of, vi, 742
Green River, Indians on, v, 199; vi, 703
Green River Snakes, condition of, i, 227–228
  village of, i, 219
Green River Valley, description of, i, 218–219
Greenville, location of camp called, vi, 338
  treaty negotiated at, vi, 342–344
  Wayne's camp at, vi, 342
Greetings of the Dacotah, iii, 244
Gregg, Dr. Josiah, explorations of, iii, 131

Grenville, Sir Richard, expedition led by, vi, 85
  hostilities provoked by, vi, 85–86, 89, 90
  settlers landed by, vi, 92
Griffen, Dr. J. S., iii, 421
Griswold Colony Band, census of, i, 478–487
Grizalba, vi, 44
  discoveries of, iii, 27
  landing of, vi, 743
Gros Ventres, v, 180, 181; vi, 686, 687
  bands of, iii, 630
  brief history, vi, 699
  census, vi, 556
  habitations, vi, 695
  identification, iii, 251, 403, 514; iv, 559; vi, 699
  language, i, 259; iii, 630; vi, 699
  listed as a linguistic family, iii, 402
  location, i, 259; iii, 594; vi, 556, 699, 705
    map showing, iii, 96
  permanent village of, iii, 630
  population, i, 523; iii, 594, 609, 630, 631; vi, 687, 695, 696, 698, 705
  synonym of Minnetarees, iii, 514
  See also Minataree.
Gros Ventres of the Prairie (Gros Ventres du Prairie), vi, 687
  census, vi, 559
  country occupied by, iii, 595; vi, 556, 695
  population, iii, 595; vi, 687, 695
  relationship, iii, 631
Groton, attacked by Indians, vi, 164
  Mohegans at, i, 524
Groton Indians, location, iii, 583
  population, iii, 583
Growing-chief, a Comanche chief, ii, 128
Guacas, Peruvian, description of, v, 90–91
  excavation of, v, 91, 93
Guadalaxara, iv, 22
Guadaloupe skeleton, cranium of, discussed, ii, 320
Guanahani, Indian name for San Salvador, iv, 554
Guandostagues, a synonym of Andastes (q. v.), iii, 290
Guardian spirits, acquisition of, vi, 633, 660, 664
  belief in, iii, 248
  different from totems, v, 196; vi, 664
  of individuals, v, 408
  of prophets, in picture writing, i, 389–391
  selection of, iv, 637–638
Guatemozin, reference to execution of, iii, 23
Guauaenok. *See* Qua i nu.
Guel Plat (Guele, Guelle Plat), i, 142; vi, 452
  chief at Sandy Lake, vi, 386
  war party led by, v, 186
  See also Gel Plat.
Guess. *See* Sequoia.
Guiana Indians. *See* Guyana Indians.
Guillon, M., iii, 355
Guipana, encountered by De Soto, ii, 37
Gulf of St. Lawrence, explored by Cartier, vi, 51, 55
  tribes of, v, 38
Gull, Winnebago war-chief, iv, 235
Gunnison, Capt. (Lt.), J., iv, 252
  death of, iv, 551, 597; v, 198
  pictographs sketched by, iii, 493
  work of, iv, 597
Gunpowder, use made of, by Iroquois, vi, 209
  See also Firearms.
Guristersigo, Creek leader, attack led by, vi, 319, 332
Gusmagio, iv, 564
Guyana Indians, religious beliefs of, iv, 489
Guzman, expedition organized by, vi, 69
Gwageoneh, Seneca name for Eries, iv, 202
Gwin, Senator, v, 468
Gypsum, in Rocky Mountain region, i, 218

H

Habe Napo (Habe-napo band), at Clear Lake council, iii, 109
  meaning of name, iii, 110
  population, iii, 634
Habitations. *See* Dwellings.
Habits, personal, v, 70
Hackluyt, Richard, vi, 96

Hadley, Indian assault on, vi, 170
Hagan, Mr., intended work of, v, 658
Hagler. *See* King Hagler.
Hahnemann, iv, 511
Hahuamis. *See* A qua mish.
Hahulteah, chief of the Quahtomah, vi, 702
Hah-wal-coes, a Yuma division, ii, 116
    location of, ii, 116
Haidai language, tribes speaking, v, 489
Hainai. *See* Ayenis; Ionees.
Hai-ne-na-une, a Comanche division, ii, 128
    meaning of name, ii, 128
Hair, Anglo-Saxon, characteristic of, v, 288
    microscopical examination of, i, 41; iii, 373–374
    Negro, characteristics, v, 288
        discussion, iv, 362–363
    racial differences in, iv, 352; v, 287
    See also Hair, Indian.
Hair, Indian, appearance of, iii, 376
    as racial characteristic, iv, 362
    characteristics, v, 288
    compared with that of other races, iii, 375–378
    illustrations of, iii, 377, 384–391
    lack of lustre in, iii, 380
    loss of color, iii, 379
    manner of wearing, iii, 220
    study, iv, 351–352
    uniformity, ii, 321
    white, discussion of, ii, 321–322
Haircut, totem indicated by, iii, 268, 269
Hair dressing, California tribes, iii, 141
    Bonak or Root-Digger, iv, 223
    Dacotah, iv, 69
    Iowa, iii, 269
    Moqui, iv, 74, 83
        illustrated, iv, 74
    Pimos and Maricopas, iii, 296
    Pueblo, iv, 76, 77
    warriors', iv, 54
    Winnebago, iv, 59
    Zuñi, iv, 220
Halderman, Samuel S., measurements of hair of, iii, 383
Haldiman, Gen., Oneidas punished by, vi, 312–313
Hale, Horatio, i, 200
    tribes classified by, i, 436, 437
    vocabularies supplied by, iii, 398
Half-King. *See* Tanacharisson.
Half-way House, a synonym of Big Tallassie, v, 262
Halket, Mr., reference to publication by, v, 53
Hall, Rev. Sherman, iv, 532
Halliday, Miss Mary, vi, 566–567
Hallowing King, chief of Cowetas, v, 263
Ham, Indians called descendants of, iii, 476–477
Hamightaghlawatawa, Nanticokes represented by, at council, vi, 132
Hamilton College, represented at funeral of Skenandoah, v, 517
Hamilton, Gov., taken as prisoner, vi, 303
Hamilton, Rev. William, acknowledgment to, iii, 376
    linguistic work of, iii, 258; iv, 549, 550
    missionary labors of, iii, 256, 258
    paper by, on Iowa language, iv, 397
    See also Irvin, S. M., and Hamilton.
Hamine-chan, origin of name, ii, 171
Hamlin, A. C., inscription copied by, vi, 607
    opinion of, cited, vi, 608
Hammersly's Inlet, Indians of, vi, 703
Hammersly's Inlet Indians, population of, v, 491
    position, v, 491
    See also Sahēhwamish.
Hampton, Col., mention of plantation of, iv, 161, 168
Hanaga Indians, census of, v, 489
    language, v, 489
Hand, Gen., vi, 309
Hand, symbolism of imprint of, ii, 58; iii, 230
Handicrafts, discussion of, ii, 511–516
    domestic, described, iv, 435–437
Handy, Charles N., vocabulary by, ii, 470
Hannakallah (Hannakallal), location of, iii, 571
    population, iii, 571, 609
Hano. *See* Harno; Tanoquevi.
Hanover, N. H., missionary work at, vi, 734
Haökah, a Dacota god, ii, 224–225
    illustration showing, ii, 224
Harahey. *See* Arache.

Hardin, Col., Kickapoo town stormed by, vi, 335
  killed by Indians, vi, 338, 342
Hare. *See* Great Hare.
Hare Indians, population of, ii, 28
  See also Kancho.
Harignera, a Susquehannock chief, vi, **136**
Haring, Dr., tradition related by, vi, 573
Harlsefne, Thorfinn, iv, 119
Harmer, Col., advance of, into Miami country, vi, 331
  defeat by Indians, v, 528, 529; vi, 217, 287, 334
Harned, William, iii, 376
Harno (Harro), a Moqui village, iv, 82
  distinct language of, iv, 87–88
  See also Tanoquevi.
Harriot, Thomas, expedition accompanied by, vi, 85
  instructions to, vi, 90
Harris, Mr., referred to, in Perrault's Relation, iii, 355, 356, 357, 359, 362, 364, 366, 369
Harris, Rev. Thaddeus M., iv, 131
Harris, T. S., translation by, iv, 528
Harrison, Gen. Wm. Henry, ability and duties of, vi, 350
  armistice granted by, vi, 364
  battle led by, at Tippecanoe, vi, 355
  campaign of, mentioned, iv, 258
  services rendered by, vi, 405
  victory on Thames River, vi, 363
Harrison, Rev. T., work of, iv, 546
Harro. *See* Harno.
Harrod, Col., Shawnees routed by, vi, 307
Hart, Maj., death of, vi, 336
Hartley, A. J., Chickasaws discussed by, v, 693–694
Hartley, Col., v, 671
Harvey, Capt. Augustus, treaty concluded by, v, 677
Harvey, H., statistics furnished by, vi, 712
Ha-sa-no-au-da, Seneca chief, iii, 290
Haslinding. *See* Has-lintah.
Has-lintah, a Trinity River village, iii, 139
Hassanamisco, Indians at, i, 287
Hassler, Prof., iii, 336
Hatch cha chubba Town, a Creek town, iv, 575
  chief of, iv, 575
Hatch chi chubba, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
Hatch ee chub ba (Hatchee chubba), a Lower Creek town, iv, 578, 580
  derivation of name, iv, 381
Hatchet-Creek, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
Hatfield, Mass., Indian attack on, vi, 160, 170
Haukoma. *See* How-ku-ma.
Havasupai. *See* Cosninas.
Haven, Langdon, ii, 114
Haw-haws, a Tuolumne band, iv, 407
Hawk chant of the Saginaws, iii, 329–330
Hawkins, Benjamin (Col.), iv, 127
  cited on earthworks, v, 110
  treaty concluded by, vi, 327
Hawkins, Maj., iv, 324
Haxa, town of, iv, 30
Haxta (Haxti), sacrifice of, iv, 50; v, 77–78; vi, 495–496
Hay, Officer, ii, 266, 269, 274, 293
Hays, Lt., ii, 262
Hayti, Spanish administration of, ii, 309–312
Head deformation, ii, 323–328; iv, 663
  effect on size of brain, ii, 333
  for males, ii, 324
  in Mexico and Peru, ii, 323, 324
  method used in, ii, 324, 325, 326–327
    illustrated, ii, 69
Headdresses, cases for, iii, 68
    illustrated, iii, 68
  Chippewa, illustrated, iii, 68
  cloth, illustrated, iii, 68
  description, iii, 67–68
  feather, illustrated, iii, 68
  Navajo, described, iv, 435
    illustrated, iv, 74
  of horns, illustrated, iii, 68
    symbolism of, iii, 68
  Pueblo, for dancing, iv, 77
  symbolism of, iii, 68
  See also Cap; Hairdressing.
Head flattening. *See* Head deformation.

Heald, Capt., massacre of troops under, vi, 359
Healing ceremony, description of, v, 437–440
Hearne, John, murder of family of, iv, 158
Hebrew coin from Indian mound, discussed, iv, 149–150
Hebrew custom, v, 60
Hebrew history, Ojibwa traditions likened to, ii, 136
Hebrew language, compared with Algonquin, ii, 421
  compared with Indian, v, 82, 86
  infixion in, iii, 61
  resemblance to Chippewa, iv, 386
    to Indian languages, iv, 387
Hebrew origin of Indians, iv, 149; v, 86; vi, 419
  argument against, vi, 88
  indications of, iii, 59–62, 228, 268
  writings on, v, 51
  See also Lost tribes of Israel; Jewish customs.
Heckewelder, Rev. John, ii, 357
  relations with Logan, iv, 621
  traditions recorded by, iv, 136
Hehighenimmo (Hihighenimmo), location, iii, 572
  population, iii, 572, 609; v, 706
  See also Sanpoil.
Hellueland, ii, 28
He maw hie Town, a Creek town, iv, 576
  leading men of, iv, 576
Hemez. *See* Jemez.
Hemorrhage, treatment for, iv, 513
Henderson, Capt., iv, 602
Hendric, King. *See* King Hendrick.
Hendrick, Capt., translation by, iv, 539
Hendrick, King. *See* King Hendrick.
Hendrick, Thomas T., emigrants commanded by, vi, 504
Hendy, Col. John, information supplied by, v, 666
Henlée, iii, 384
Henly, Thomas J., population table compiled by, vi, 715
Hennepin, Lewis, explorations of, i, 136
Henry, Alexander, trade with Indians, vi, 269
Henry, Dr. Chas. C., Apachee vocabulary by, v, 578
Henry, Dr. Charlton, quoted on the Apaches, v, 205–212
Henry, George, translations by, iv, 535
Henry, Dr. T. C., Apachees discussed by, v, 695
Hen-ta-pah-tus (Hen-tee-pah-atees), a Yankton band, ii, 169
  country occupied by, ii, 169
Henya. *See* Hanaga.
Heredity, among medicine men, v, 652
  in chieftainship, iii, 112
  in office, i, 194
  matrilineal, of ruler, i, 311
  See also Descent.
Herkimer, convocation held at, vi, 324
  massacre at, v, 511–512
Herkimer, Gen., death of, vi, 289
  fort relieved by, vi, 287–289
Hermaphrodite, Indian, ii, 115
Hernandez de Cordova, Francisco, discoveries of, iii, 27
Hernes, a synonym of Jemez, iv, 32
  reached by Spaniards, iv, 39
  See also Jemez.
Hernia, treatment for, iv, 514
Herring Pond Indians, i, 287
  location, iii, 583
  population, iii, 583
Herriot, Mr., cited on tobacco, vi, 88
  quoted on Indian beliefs, vi, 87
Hesperia, use of name, v, 594
Hess, William, work of, iv, 526, 527
Heutzilapochtli, sacrifices to, v, 103
He-wa-tho-cha, Iowa chief, characterization of, iii, 265
Hewit, Dr., quoted on depopulation of tribes, vi, 180–181
Heyoka, discussion of, vi, 651–652
  gods of the Dakotas, iv, 645
Hiacoomes, missionary work of, vi, 734
Hiawatha, an Iroquois divinity, vi, 188
  meaning of name, iii, 315; v, 157
  myth concerning, vi, 670
  story of, iii, 314–317; v, 157–163; vi, 571–572
Hickory-Ground, a Creek town, iv, 576
  chief of, v, 255
  map of, v, 255
  Upper Creek town, iv, 578
  See also Little Tallassie.
Hidatsa. *See* Belantse-Eteas; Gros Ventres; Metahartas; Minataree.

Hidatsa language. *See* Minnetaree language.
Hieroglyphics, development of, i, 342
  system of, i, 422
Hiester, F. A., communication from, iv, 324
Hi ga gee, a Lower Creek town, iv, 578
High Log, a Lower Creek town, iv, 578
Hildreth, Dr., i, 184
Hill, A., translation made by, iv, 526, 527
Hill, Benjamin M., report by, on missions, v, 699
Hillabee (Hillabe Town, Hillabees), a Creek town, iv, 576, 578; v, 262
  attack on, vi, 367
  chief of, iv, 576
  mention of battle of, vi, 370, 379
Hillabees (Hillabes) district, v, 255
  location, v, 262
Hillabi. *See* Hillabee.
Hilleamuck, population, vi, 701
Hillishagee, activities, vi, 374
  flight, vi, 374
Hindoo customs, compared with Indian, iii, 61; v, 217
Hindoo gods, length of life of, iv, 664
Hindoo race, characteristics, v, 58
  country occupied by, v, 57
  religion, v, 57–58
Hiokato, vi, 98
Hirrahagua. *See* Hirrihigua.
Hirrihagua. *See* Hirrihigua.
Hirrihigua (Hirrahagua, Hirrihagua), ii, 34; v, 410
  De Soto at village of, iii, 36
  De Soto opposed by, iii, 30
  death of mother of, iii, 29–30; vi, 743
  mutilated by Narvaez, iii, 29; vi, 45
History of Indian tribes, i, 13–17
  chronological table of, vi, 742–744
  fables preserved in, i, 13
Hitchatees. *See* Hitch e tee.
Hitchcock, Dr., i, 179
Hitchcock, Gen., quoted on California tribes, v, 216
Hitchcock, Mr., pottery recovered by, iii, 77
Hitch e tee (Hitchatees) town, a Lower Creek town, iv, 578; v, 262
  chiefs of, iv, 580
Hitchetees (Hitchites, Hitchittee), v, 256
  classification, iii, 401
  linguistic relations, iii, 404
  numeral system, v, 244
Hitchies, i, 239
  identity lost by intermarriage, i, 240
Hitchitee (Hitchittee) language, a Muskogee dialect, i, 268
  vocabulary (numerals), ii, 220–221
Hitchites. *See* Hitchetees.
Hitchiti. *See* Hitchetee; Hitchetees.
Hitchiti language. *See* Hitchitee language.
Hitchittee. *See* Hitchetees.
Hitch o par tar ga, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
Hlekatchka. *See* Broken Arrow.
Hoako. *See* Hocks.
Hobie fixico of Hemawhie Town, iv, 576
Hochelaga (Hocheloga), former name of Montreal, v, 76; vi, 200, 743
  fortification at, v, 110
  Indian village at, i, 305
  location, ii, 85
  negotiations at, ii, 85
  people occupying, iii, 320
  reached by Cartier, i, 134; vi, 56
  Wyandots living at, iv, 383
Hochitagete, Chief, vi, 140
Hochungara tribe, account of, iii, 277–283
  meaning of name, iii, 277
  type of the Dacotahs, iii, 267
  Winnebago name for themselves, iii, 277
  See also Winnebago.
Hockhocking, origin of name, iv, 380
Hocks, location, vi, 710
  population, vi, 710
Hodgkins, Chief John, v, 237
Hoffman, Martinus, speech of, quoted, vi, 133
Hogs, introduction of, into Florida, vi, 616
Hoha, Dacotah name for Assinaboins, iii, 539
Hohilpos (Hopilpo), location, iii, 572
  population, iii, 572; v, 706
Hohost-ilp-ilp, Chief, meaning of name, i, 226

Hohtatoga, a Lower Creek town, v, 262
Ho-is, a Comanche division, II, 127
  meaning of name, II, 127
Hoithlewaule, derivation of the name, IV, 380
Hokamish, VI, 687
  population, I, 521; VI, 687
  See also Skokomish.
Hokedi. *See* Kook a tee.
Holbrook, Prof., II, 320
Hole-in-the-day, II, 161; v, 185
  Ojibwa war chief, II, 151
Hole-in-the-sky, II, 162
  wife of, II, 161
Holeman, Maj., at peace council, IV, 596
Holilepas, location, VI, 710
  population, VI, 710
Hollenback, Col., reference to family of, v, 673
Hollenback, Matthias, v, 668
Holman, J. H., information furnished by, v, 198
Holmes, Maj. A. H., VI, 375
  at Michilimackinac, VI, 375
  death of, VI, 376
  North-West factory destroyed by, VI, 398
Holston River region, described, III, 346
Holyoke, VI, 169
Homamish (Homanish), VI, 687
  brief account of, v, 700
  population, I, 521, VI, 701
  See also Shomamish.
Hominy (Homony), making of, I, 80; III, 466
Honayawus, Niagara Indians represented by, VI, 326
Honeoye village, destruction of, VI, 310
Ho nese har jo, a Thlakatchka chief, IV, 579
Honey, bad use of, IV, 68
Honey Creek, Presbyterian station at, IV, 589
Honey-Eaters. *See* Penointik-ara.
Honsading. *See* Oke-noke.
Hon. Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, work of, VI, 734, 735, 736
Honyerry, death of, VI, 312
Hon Yost, reprieve from the gallows, VI, 290
Hoo-choop, Chief, treaty signed by, III, 279
  tribute levied by, III, 280
Hood's Bay, Indians of, v, 489
Hood's Canal, Indians of, VI, 703
Hookluhmic Indians, population of, I, 521
  See also Lummi.
Hook-swinging, Hindoo custom of, v, 59
Hoopah Indians (Hoo-pah), a lower Trinity tribe, III, 139
  application of name, III, 422
  See also Trinity Indians.
Hoopah language, extent of use, III, 422
  vocabulary, III, 440–445
  See also Nabil-tse.
Hoopah villages, list of, III, 139
Hoosatunnuk. *See* Housatonics.
Hootsinoo Indians, census, v, 489
  language, v, 489
  location, v, 489
Ho-paiuh, a Klamath River tribe, III, 634
Hopaiuh, a village on Klamath River, III, 138
Ho-pee-kaw's Band, census of, I, 498–507
Hopi. *See* Moqui.
Hopilpo. *See* Hohilpo.
Hopkins, Capt., II, 302
  expedition of, II, 266
Hopkins, Gen., march against Wabash Indians, VI, 360
Hopkins, Mr., work of, IV, 547
Ho po uth lo yoholo, of Tuckabatchcha Town, IV, 575
Horse raising, country adapted to, I, 222
Horses, advantage to Indians, v, 197
  intelligence, IV, 108
  introduction, VI, 616
    effect of, I, 207–208
    fear caused by, III, 59
  of the Navajoes, IV, 212
  raised in large numbers, I, 222
  sacrificed for the dead, II, 68; v, 78; VI, 622
  spoils of war, I, 236
  used for food, II, 133; v, 650
  wild, origin of, v, 197
Horse-Shoe, battle of the, VI, 372, 379
Horse-stealing, attitude toward, v, 181
Hosmer, W. H. C., v, 673

Hospitality, among barbarians, iv, 345
  among the Mohawks, iii, 190
  of the Indians, iv, 343–344
  of the Moquis, iv, 88
  shown by Congarees, iv, 158
Ho tal le ho yar nar, a Lower Creek town, iv, 578
Hotchkiss, E., report on the Choctaws, iv, 585
Hot-house, Creek, description of, v, 265–266
Hotlimamish. *See* Shotlemamish.
Hot springs, near Des Schutes River, i, 221
Hou a guan, census, v, 489
  language, v, 489
Houghton, Dr. Douglas, i, 144, 145, 148
  pottery collected by, i, 84
  survey entrusted to, iv, 190
Housatonic Valley, tribe of, vi, 504
Housatonics (Housatonick, Hoosatunnuk), etymology of the name, v, 593
  missionary work among, vi, 734, 736
  represented at Canandaigua council, vi, 326
  See also Stockbridges.
House of Montezuma, description of, iii, 299–301
Houses. *See* Dwellings.
Howard, Capt., vi, 256
Howard, Don Carolus Caxton, v, 253
Howe, Dr., iv, 170
Howe, Rev. George, crucible described by, vi, 610
  essay on Congaree Indians, iv, 155–169
Howe, Lord, death of, vi, 226
Howkan. *See* Hou a guan.
How-ku-ma band, at Clear Lake council, iii, 109
How-te-té-oh language, from Rogue's River, iii, 423
Hudedut. *See* How-te-té-oh.
Hudson, Hendrick (Hendrik), drinking party staged by, vi, 101–102
  explorations of, ii, 23–24; vi, 100–102, 744
  with Indians, illustration of, ii, 24; vi, 100
Hudson(s) Bay, classification of language of, iii, 401
Hudson(s) Bay Co., iv, 101
  fur sales of, vi, 728–730
  influence on Oregon tribes, v, 656
  policy, iii, 144
Hudson River, exploration of, vi, 100–102
  Indian names of, vi, 100, 504
  name bestowed on, vi, 102
  tribes on, v, 137; vi, 147
Hudson River region, tribes of, vi, 101
Huebschmann, F., population table by, vi, 707
Huestas, Mr., mention of expedition of, iii, 120
Huexotzincoes, iii, 515
Huitramannaland, a name for Virginia, vi, 742
Huitsla, classification, iii, 402
  location, iii, 402
Hula-napo band (Huta Napo), at Clear Lake council, iii, 109
  population, iii, 634
Hula-napo language. *See* Kula-napo language.
Hull, Gen. (Gov.) William, ii, 226; vi, 356, 358, 359, 381
  surrender of, vi, 259, 261
Hullooellell, iii, 571
Human sacrifice, corn planting marked by, iv, 50; vi, 496
  witnessed by Rev. J. England, v, 59
Humanos (Jumanos, Yumanos), map showing location of, ii, 28
  named by De Vaca, ii, 21
  supposed descendants of, ii, 29
  territory occupied by, ii, 28
  use of term, i, 242
Humboldt, Alexander, discussion of writings of, v, 53, 55
  pyramid measured by, vi, 582
  vocabularies used by, ii, 358
Humboldt, William, v, 53
Humboldt, William von, ii, 347
Humboldt Bay, described, iii, 131
  discovery, iii, 131
  mortality among Indians of, vi, 711
Humboldt River, Indians of, v, 201
  peculiarity of, v, 201
Humboldt (town), described, iii, 131
  illustration of, iii, 131
Huna. *See* Huna cow.
Huna cow, a Cross Sound tribe, v, 489
  census, v, 489

Hunkpapa. *See* Onch-pa-pah.
Hunkpatidan, a subdivision of the Ihanktonwan, I, 248
Hunkpatina. *See* Hen-ta-pah-tus; Hunkpatidan.
Hunt, Rev. Robert, expedition joined by, VI, 96
Hunter, John, petition signed by, III, 618
Hunter, John Dunn, V, 54
Hunter, Senator, of Virginia, chairman of Finance Committee, V, 461
  information requested by, V, 461
Hunter state, absence of conditions of, in Mexico, V, 292
  and agricultural, links between, V, 204
  distinctive phases of, III, 62–64
Hunter tribes, VI, 552–558
  census, VI, 556
  civilization of, I, 44–46
  food, VI, 553
  land provided for, VI, 416
Hunter's dream, story of, I, 321
Hunting, beliefs concerning, I, 382–383
  ceremonial feast connected with, III, 61
  instruction of boys in, I, 382; II, 50
  of deer and antelope, III, 213
  pictographs of, I, 382–388
  popular error concerning, III, 478–479
  the great spirit of, V, 420
  use of cunning in, III, 246
  use of magic in, I, 382; II, 51; V, 76, 397
  See also Buffalo; Game; Hunting customs.
Hunting customs, Algonquin, VI, 661
  Athapascan, V, 176, 177
  Cayouse, I, 221
  compared with Hebrew, III, 61
  Creek, I, 278
  Dacotah, II, 185–186; III, 234; IV, 59–61
  general, II, 53–55; III, 61
  in north-west California, III, 113
  of Atacama, Peru, III, 540
  Sioux, II, 185–186
  See also Animals; Buffalo; Game.
Hunting exploits, II, 54–55
Hunting-grounds, ratio of population to, I, 433
  result of exhaustion of, VI, 377–378
  rights to, I, 278; II, 131, 185
Hunting scenes, illustrations of, II, 51, 53, 55, 57
Huntington, Abel, petition signed by, III, 618
Huntington, D. B., interpreter, IV, 596
Huokarawaocks, location of, VI, 131
Hupa. *See* Hoopah; Nabil-tse; Trinity Indians.
Hurlburt, Rev. Thomas, memoir by, on Chippewa language, IV, 385
Huron-Iroquois family, VI, 137
Huron or Wyandot stock, tribes of, III, 590
Hurons, III, 554
  allies of, VI, 138
  classification, III, 401
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  derivation of name, IV, 382
  flight, before the Iroquois, V, 143; VI, 143
  French name for Wyandots, VI, 200
  linguistic affinities, IV, 207
  missionary work among, VI, 735, 739
  of upper Canada, reference to, VI, 137
  offered help by the Andastes, VI, 143
  origin belief of, VI, 627
  part taken by, in Pontiac's conspiracy, II, 242, 243, 247, 248, 252, 260, 263, 274, 275, 279, 281, 288, 293, 295, 301, 302, 303, 307
  Pontiac joined by, VI, 243
  population, VI, 270, 271
  relations with the French, V, 647
  territory occupied by, I, 305; IV, 204
  totems, III, 554; IV, 204
  treaty signed by, VI, 255
  tribes composing, IV, 204
  warriors, number of, III, 554; VI, 270, 271
  western, migrations of, VI, 734
  See also Wantats; Wyandots.
Huta Napo. *See* Hula-napo.
Hutchins, Thomas, statistics furnished by, VI, 713, 714
Hutchinson, Capt. Thomas, Indian population estimated by, III, 553–561; V, 479

Huts, bark, described, i, 191–192
  illustrated, i, 192
Hutsnuwu. *See* Hootsinoo.
Hybridity, discussion of phenomena of, iv, 358–359
Hymns to the Sun, words of, i, 400

I

Iaba Waddik, family of, iv, 350
Iägoo, a mythological character, v, 409
Ice-cutting implements, description of, i, 88–89
  illustrated, ii, 516
  use of, ii, 514
Iceland, discovery of natives of, vi, 742
Icosans, absorbed by Creeks, vi, 370
  era of, v, 133
  foes of the Creeks, v, 98
Ida-ka-riúke, a Shaste Valley band, iii, 171
Idolatry, in India, v, 58
  pictographs in, 342–343
Idol-pipe, mutilated, illustrated, ii, 90
Idols, Aztec, description of, vi, 585–586
  illustration of, i, 120
  lack of, i, 50
Ietam, country occupied by, iii, 597
  population, iii, 597
Ietan. *See* Ietam; Jetam.
Ihanktonwan, a grand division of the Dacotas, i, 248
  dialect of, i, 249
  meaning of name, i, 248
  population, i, 249
  range, i, 248
  subdivisions of, i, 248
  See also Yankton.
Ihanktonwanna, a subdivision of the Ihanktonwan, i, 248
Ihoways. *See* Iowas.
Ikanhatki. *See* Ecunhutlee.
Ika-ruck, a Shaste Valley band, iii, 171
Illinese, agricultural ability of, i, 59
  descendants of, i, 59; v, 192
  remains left by, v, 191–192
  territory occupied by, vi, 206
  tribes composing, v, 41
  See also Illinois Indians.
Illinois, admission to the Union, vi, 393
  and Indiana, Indian population of, v, 480
  derivation of name, iv, 379
Illinois—Continued
  Indian lands in, iii, 584, 586; v, 480
  Indian population of, iii, 584, 586; v, 480, 481
  population and area of, iv, 610
  tribes of, v, 40
Illinois country, activities of Pontiac in, ii, 306–308
  tribes dwelling in, vi, 714
Illinois Indians, iii, 278, 555; v, 647; vi, 573
  country occupied by, iii, 559; vi, 33
  cranial measurements, ii, 335
  in the limits of De Soto's marches, ii, 35
  included in Algonquin group, ii, 36
  name for themselves, vi, 573
  partial extermination, ii, 308
  threatened by Pontiac, ii, 307
  warriors, estimate of number of, iii, 555, 559
  See also Illinese.
Illinois language, an Algonquin dialect, ii, 341
  classification, iii, 401
Illinois mission, work of, vi, 735
Illinois River, dispute concerning, iii, 155
  Indians in valley of, vi, 206
  tribes of, v, 191
Images, Aztec, in Pueblo village, iv, 82
  representing disease, iv, 491
  use in ceremony, iv, 73
Immookfau, meaning of the name, iv, 381
Immortality of the soul, Algonquin belief in, iii, 60
  Chickasaw belief in, i, 310
  Comanche belief in, i, 237; ii, 131
  Dacotah belief in, iii, 229
  Indian belief in, ii, 68; v, 79
  Massachusetts Indians belief in, i, 286
  Sioux belief in, ii, 178; iii, 229
  See also Future life; Soul; Resurrection; Transmigration of the soul.
Imperturbability of Indian male, v, 183
  See also Stoicism.
Implements, ancient bronze, iv, 438–440
  illustrated, iv, 438

Implements—Continued
  antique Mexican, vi, 580
  bone, i, 87–88, 213; iii, 468
    illustrated, i, 88, 211; iii, 468
  Congaree, described, iv, 159–169
    illustrated, iv, 160, 164–168
  copper, described and illustrated, i, 67; iv, 438–439
    from Peruvian guacas, v, 92
    in Ohio, v, 665–666
  domestic, ii, 514
  fleshing, illustrated, iii, 467
  found in New York State, ii, 90–91
  from Chippewa territory, i, 68
  from Cunningham's Island, ii, 86–87
  from ossuaries, illustrated, i, 103–104
  ice cutting, i, 88–89; ii, 514
    illustrated, ii, 516
  of the Blackfeet, v, 182
  of the Ojibwa, ii, 137, 138
  Peruvian, v, 92
    illustrated, v, 93
  priority in antiquity of, v, 395
  problematical, from New York, iv, 174
  Shoshonean, list of, i, 211
  Shoshonee, illustrated, i, 211
  used in mining, ii, 31; iv, 144; v, 396
  used in skin dressing, ii, 64
  wooden, ii, 516
    illustrated, ii, 516
  See also Utensils; Weapons.
Inca(s), form of government of, ii, 330–331
  meaning of name, v, 89
  mental capacity, v, 94
  power, v, 89
  remains of house of, described, v, 94
  use of term, iii, 62
Incest, among the Kenistenos, v, 167
Independence, Ohio, rock sculptures at, v, 113–114; vi, 604
India, application of name, v, 57
Indian affairs, commissioners entrusted with, vi, 293
  management of, vi, 321
Indian agents, suggestions regarding, ii, 531–532
Indian Bureau (Department), funds required for, ii, 565–580
  mention of work of, v, 54
  organization of, vi, 404–405, 456, 457
Indian corn. *See* Corn.
Indian country, mineral resources of, i, 149–163
  physical geography, i, 133–138; iv, 179–194
Indian lands. *See* Lands.
Indian languages. *See* Languages, Indian. *See also* under tribal names.
Indian mind. *See* Intellectual capacity; Mental characteristics.
Indian names. *See* Names.
Indian population. *See* Population, Indian.
Indian Territory, description of tribes of, v, 485
  Indian lands in, iv, 183
  population and area of, iv, 610
Indian tribes. *See* Indians; Tribes, Indian.
Indian villages, destruction of, by Sullivan's army, vi, 311
Indian wars, effect on tribes, vi, 379–381
  estimated cost, v, 500
  of 1812–16, origin, vi, 374
  of New England, vi, 116–127
  principles involved in, vi, 507–509, 512
  See also Black Hawk; Creek war; French and Indian Wars; Pontiac; Tecumseh; and under tribal names.
Indiana, admission of, to the Union, vi, 393
  and Illinois, number of Indians in, v, 480
  Indian lands in, iii, 584, 586; v, 480
  number of Indians in, iii, 584, 586; v, 480, 481
  population and area of, iv, 610
  tribes of, v, 40
Indians (American aborigines), annuities, effect on, i, 279
  antiquity of, v, 69–70, 87–88
  appropriations for, statement, ii, 564
  attitude during Revolutionary War, vi, 279–281

- Indians (American aborigines)—Con.
  - causes of decline, I, 192; VI, 561–563
  - character, fixity of, I, 412
  - characteristics of, I, 15, 17; IV, 354–365
    - mental, III, 326–328; VI, 507–509
    - oriental, I, 14, 15
    - physical, II, 315–335; III, 373–393; IV, 349–365; V, 287–292
  - civilization of, I, 44–46; IV, 357; VI, 592–594
    - effect on, V, 44–46; VI, 561; VI, 428–430
    - resistance to, V, 33–34
  - classed with Ethiopian race, III, 477
  - colonial changes affecting, VI, 235–237
  - colonization, discussed, IV, 180, 459–475
  - color, IV, 361, 362; VI, 573
  - comparison with Asiatic races, I, 35–42
  - condition, at discovery, I, 54–55; II, 26; IV, 657–658; VI, 199, 567–570
    - amelioration of, II, 522–525, V, 46
    - in 1800–1825, VI, 346–376
    - of colonies of, IV, 461–463
  - condition and prospects of, II, 519–537; IV, 457–486; VI, 515–558
  - culture, stages in, V, 89
    - state of, IV, 114–115
  - employment by British in war, VI, 292–296
  - ethnological families, two, II, 328; VI, 595
  - evolution, III, 247
  - exploitation, III, 21–22
  - first contact with, VI, 36–37
  - foods, staple, IV, 445
  - heads of, described, IV, 357
  - history, chronological, VI, 742–744
    - discussion of, V, 129–133
    - early, as shown by picture writing, I, 343–344
    - general, III, 21–50
  - hunter stage, I, 44–46
  - improvident nature, VI, 562, 569–570
  - intellectual capacity and character, II, 201–235; IV, 251–262; V, 130–131, 243–248
- Indians (American aborigines)—Con.
  - investments for, statement, II, 561–563
  - land rights, recognition of, VI, 320
  - life, in Colonial days, VI, 183–184
  - manners and customs, II, 39–80
  - mental traits, III, 326–328; VI, 507–509
    - type, I, 29–43
  - migrations, forced, IV, 317
  - misconceptions regarding, III, 478–480; V, 50–52
  - northern, compared with Aztec, VI, 595–596
  - origin, discussed, III, 476–477
    - of name, V, 28, 57
  - policy toward, III, 209–210; IV, 473–475; V, 449–473; VI, 186, 320–322
  - population, total, III, 559, 581; V, 485
  - protection for, problem of, IV, 180–185
  - recommendations concerning, 457–560
  - remarks on, by Benjamin Franklin, IV, 342–345
  - removal to west of the Mississippi, V, 46; VI, 416–425
    - effect on, V, 141
    - of remnants of, IV, 180
    - plans for, III, 573–580; IV, 259, 474–475; V, 450–451; VI, 407–415
    - policy of, II, 546
  - results of Act affecting, V, 455
  - retreat before white population, V, 472
  - southern, resources of, VI, 366
  - study of, by Europeans, V, 53–54
  - suggestions for government of, IV, 469–470
  - system of management of, V, 43
  - territory occupied by, IV, 357
  - Texas law concerning, VI, 708
  - treatment of, as shown by expenditures, II, 545–546
  - unity, IV, 353; V, 89, 289–291; VI, 573
  - *See also* Tribes, Indian.
- Indo-Germanic languages, traced to Hindoo race, V, 58

- Infanticide, among the Choctaw, vi, 524
  - among the Creeks, v, 272
  - among the Dacotah, iii, 243
  - among the Kenistenos, v, 167
- Infidelity, Apache punishment for, v, 211
  - Blackfeet punishment for, v, 686
  - Comanche punishment for, i, 236; ii, 132
- Infirm and aged people, treatment of, iv, 56, 67, 241; v, 179
- Informants, Indian, unreliability of, iii, 260
- Ingersoll, C. J., iii, 383
- Ingolf, vi, 742
- Inheritance. *See* Descent.
- Initiation ceremony, of the Medicine society, iii, 286–288; v, 426–433
- Inlanders, a synonym of Nopeming, v, 145
- Insanity, causes of, iv, 505
  - Indian attitude toward, iv, 49
  - relative immunity from, among savages, iv, 505
- Inscription Rock (Canada), pictographs on, i, 407
- Inscription Rock (N. Mex.), expedition camped at, iv, 34–35
  - pueblo on, iv, 33
- Inscription Rock (Pa.), description of, iv, 172–173
  - illustrations of, iv, 172, 173
  - location, iv, 172
- Inscription stone, i, 121–124; v, 85
  - discovery of, i, 120
  - illustration of, i, 122
- Inscriptions, iv, 663–664, 665
  - along line of migration, i, 411
  - Asiatic, likened to North American, i, 424–425
  - Assonet, discussion of, vi, 113–114
    - illustrated, vi, 113
  - at Bellows' Falls, Vt., illustration of, vi, 606
  - Cunningham's Island, discussed, iii, 85–87
    - illustrated, iii, 85, 87
  - Dighton Rock, i, 108–120, 304; iv, 117, 119–120; vi, 113–114, 609
  - found in New Mexico, illustrated, vi, 69
  - Grave Creek, compared with Phoenician, vi, 611
- Inscriptions—Continued
  - Icelandic and Indian, i, 107
  - illustrations of, i, 114, 119, 122, 427; iv, 173, 251, 253
  - in Lapland, i, 425–428
  - in Massachusetts, i, 107–120
  - in Ohio Valley, i, 124–125
  - in West Virginia, i, 120–124
  - Lake Erie, discussed, iii, 85–87
  - Laplandish, illustrated, i, 427
  - left by Chippewa chief, i, 304
  - Monhegan Island, illustration of, vi, 611
  - of Tartary, account of, i, 424
    - illustrated, i, 425
  - on bark, i, 338
  - on buffalo bone, illustrated, vi, 70
  - on dressed skin, illustrated, iv, 251
  - on rocks, discussed, i, 107–120, 405–407
  - on Sculptured Rock, ii, 87–88
  - on small globular stone, i, 124–125
  - on tabular stone, i, 107–125
  - Phoenician, illustration of, vi, 630
  - pictographic, illustration of, ii, 88
  - purposes served by, vi, 606
  - recording Indian exploits, i, 414
  - Runic, on Baffin Bay island, iv, 119
  - showing Celtic characters, v, 34
  - Siberian, account of, i, 424
    - illustrated, i, 424
  - spurious, i, 109
  - supposed Celtic, discussion of, iv, 118
  - supposed Grecian, in Mississippi Valley, iv, 116
  - supposed Scandinavian, iii, 540
  - symbols of sun in, vi, 629
  - *See also* Inscription Rock; Inscription Stone; Mnemonic devices; Pictographs; Rock sculptures.
- Instruction. *See* Children; Education.
- Intellectual capacity, and character, Indian, i, 315–430; ii, 201–235; iv, 251–262; v, 243–248
  - of Algonquin group, v, 81
  - of Appalachian group, v, 81
  - of California tribes, iii, 220
  - of Dacotahs, iv, 70
  - of Iroquois, v, 81
  - of Oregon tribes, iii, 220
  - subjects indicating, i, 315

Intemperance. *See* Intoxication.
Interior Indians (Chippewas), population of, vi, 692
Intermarriage, of French and Indians, v, 529, 674, 677
  of Indians and Scotch traders, vi, 345, 351
  with Whites, effect of, iii, 221
Interpreters, attitude of, iii, 268
Intoxication, among the Iowas, vi, 548, 549
  among the Iroquois, iii, 194
  effect of, on Indians, iii, 241–242
  encouraged by traders, iii, 191
  Navajoes not given to, iv, 214
  unknown among Moquis, iv, 87
  See also Alcoholic liquors.
Investments for Creeks, statement of, iv, 571
Inyancheyaka-atonwan. *See* Little Rapids band.
Iolofs, African, physical characteristics of, iv, 363
Ionees (Ionies), iii, 403; vi, 687
  dwellings, v, 682
  language, v, 682, 712
  location, vi, 704 705
  origin tradition, v, 682
  population, i, 518; iii, 635; v, 702; vi, 687, 699, 704, 708
  relations with Texans, v, 712
  See also Ayenis.
Iowa, population and area of, iv, 610
Iowa language, iv, 397–406
  classification, iii, 266
  publications in, iv, 549–550
  reference to work on, iii, 260–261
Iowas (Ihoways, Ioways), iii, 557; vi, 452, 546, 687
  ancestry of, iii, 278
  and Sacs, at missions, v, 698
  appropriation for, ii, 564
  census, i, 498–507; iii, 621–628
  chiefs of, iii, 264–265
  claim concerning origin, iv, 227
  clans, iii, 268–269
  classification, iii, 267, 402
  condition, general, iv, 466
    report on, vi, 548–550
  De Vaca's name for, ii, 37
  fiscal statistics relating to, vi, 720, 721
  funds required for, ii, 569
Iowas (Ihoways, Ioways)—Con.
  geography of territory, iii, 270–273
  history, early, iii, 261–262
  in the Dacota group, ii, 37
  lands, iv, 572
    ceded by, ii, 604; iii, 259
    disposal of, v, 496
    purchased from, ii, 599
    statistics on, ii, 606
  language, iii, 266, 562
  linguistic affinities, i, 248
  listed as one of Seven Fires, ii, 169
  location, i, 498; iii, 585, 593; iv, 461; v, 495; vi, 705
    maps showing, iv, 180; vi, 519
  migration legend, v, 98
  migration of, with map, iii, 256–259
  missionary work among, vi, 739
  of Siouan stock, i, 197
  orator of, iii, 265–266
  other names of, ii, 37; iii, 256, 547, 562, 566
  population, iii, 258, 562, 585, 593; iv, 466, 572; v, 495; vi, 687, 705
  rank, among other tribes, iii, 266–267
  relations with the Sacs, iii, 267
  removal of, iv, 485; v, 495; vi, 536
  totem, iii, 557
  trade, iii, 564
  trading post for, iii, 566
  treaty made by, vi, 421
  treaty with, v, 496, 497
  tribal relations of, iii, 566; iv, 550
  villages, number of, iii, 562
  victory over Osages, iii, 264
  vital statistics of, iii, 258
  warriors, estimates of, iii, 557, 562
  See also Aijoues.
Ioways. *See* Iowas.
Irega, era of, v, 133
Irocosia, use of name, i, 305
Iron, discovery of, in Greece, v, 88
Ironstone, magnetic, distribution of, i, 150
Iroquoian stock. *See* Iroquois family.
Iroquois, iii, 553; vi, 687
  account of, i, 197; ii, 538–542
  affinities, i, 197
  aided by corn, ii, 30
  Algonquin name for, v, 193
  Allegans overpowered by, v, 98

Iroquois—Continued
- alliance with the Dutch, VI, 189
- application of term, IV, 616
- ascendency of, IV, 525
- at Braddock's defeat, VI, 217, 218
- belief in evil spirits, IV, 490
- burial customs, III, 193
- cause of supremacy, IV, 142
- census, I, 441–457; V, 481; VI, 718
- comparison with Mexican tribes, V, 107
- confederation of, benefits gained by, V, 107
- conquests made by, I, 197; III, 74; V, 647
- cosmogony of, V, 155–163; VI, 666–670
- councils of, VI, 189
- country inhabited by, I, 197; VI, 33–34, 147
- cranial capacity, II, 332; III, 250; V, 244
- cranial measurements, II, 335
- creation myth, I, 316–317
- culture, state of, V, 105
- customs, III, 193; VI, 57, 672–673
- dance derived from Dakotahs, VI, 617
- descent of chiefs of, V, 73; VI, 627
- English aided by, VI, 209, 234
- fear of, by other tribes, VI, 130, 260
- female descent among, V, 73; VI, 627
- five cantons of, IV, 204
- fortifications against, V, 109
  - erected by, I, 48; V, 110
- history, VI, 188–190
- in the Revolutionary War, V, 510, 513; VI, 281
- land cessions made by, VI, 323–325
- last fight with Ojibwas, II, 149
- Lenni Lenapee preceded by, V, 99
- linguistic affinities of, IV, 207
- map showing location, II, 28
- migration, V, 98
- missionary work among, VI, 735, 736, 738, 739
- mythology of, V, 75
- name, origin of, III, 320; VI, 188
  - others for, III, 292; IV, 616; V, 41; VI, 130, 188, 236
- of the West, population of, VI, 275
- origin and spread of, VI, 33
- origin legend, V, 147
- pictography, I, 429
  - illustrated, I, 421, 429, 430
- policy toward the English, VI, 219–220
- policy toward, of American Government, VI, 325–326
- population, I, 523; V, 481; VI, 270, 275, 687, 706
- position after the Revolution, VI, 324, 325
- power held by, VI, 194–195
- relations with the English, VI, 149, 189–190, 228
  - with the French, V, 147, 522–523, 647
- skulls of, shape, II, 317
- stature, IV, 349
- superior physique of, V, 243–244
- supremacy over Algonquins, VI, 148
- supreme deity of, III, 511
- territory dominated by, VI, 194
- totemic system, IV, 666; V, 73
- totems, III, 553; IV, 204
- traditions, I, 125–126; V, 134
- treaties with New York State, VI, 324
- tribes composing, VI, 194
  - conquered by, VI, 34
- war against Cherokees and Catabas, II, 36
  - with the Andastes, VI, 139
  - with the Eries, IV, 201–203
- warriors, number of, III, 553
- *See also* Iroquois Confederacy; Five Nations; Mingo; Nadowaig; Nautowas; Six Nations.

Iroquois Confederacy, advantages of, V, 136–137
- affinities, I, 197
- brief account of, II, 36–37
- changes in population, IV, 603
- dissolution, VI, 310, 324
- extent of influence, III, 196
- formal expedition against, VI, 308–311
- formation, I, 197; II, 36–37; VI, 484–485
- history, III, 181–199
- legend of origin, V, 157–163, 636–646
- policy toward conquered tribes, IV, 605

Iroquois Confederacy—Continued
- political organization, iii, 182–184
- power, iii, 184
- principles recommended to Colonies, iii, 183–184
- resemblance to Greek council, iii, 183
- resemblance of U. S. Government to, iii, 198
- *See also* Five Nations; Six Nations.

Iroquois family (group, stock), an ethnological family, ii, 343
- brief account of, ii, 36–37
- cranial capacity, vi, 574
  - measurements, ii, 335
- division in, iv, 198
- known by style of moccasin, iii, 66
- one of seven generic families, ii, 33
- tribes adopting Christianity, v, 504
  - composing, iii, 401
- vocabularies, ii, 482–493
- *See also* Huron or Wyandot stock; Iroquois.

Iroquois language, iii, 192; vi, 190
- bibliography of works in, iv, 525–531
- formation of names in, v, 571
- geographical names in, with derivations, iv, 381–384
- sevenfold dialects of, iii, 96
- supposed Greek element in, iii, 183; iv, 117

Irvin, Rev. S. M., Indian cruelties described by, v, 650
- linguistic work of, iii, 258; iv, 550
- missionary labors of, iii, 256, 258

Irvin, S. M., and Hamilton, Wm., Iowa grammar prepared by, iv, 549–550
- paper by, on the Iowa and Sac tribes, iii, 259–276

Irving, Washington, v, 101, 594
- extracts from work of, ii, 309

Isanyati (Issati), a grand division of the Dacotas, i, 248
- a synonym of Dakotah, vi, 66
- location, i, 247, 248; vi, 34
- origin of name, i, 248
- population, i, 248
- subdivisions, i, 248
- the Great Western family, vi, 72

Is-chaw-go-baw-kaw's Band, census of, i, 498–507

Is far ne e marth lar, a Cussetaw Town chief, iv, 579

Ishack, a Klamath chief, iii, 173

Ish-shu-ku, a Comanche chief, ii, 126

Island, James, A Coweta Town chief, iv, 579

Island of the Blessed, story of, i, 321

Islands, Absalom, a Coweta Town chief, iv, 579

Isle Royal, Lake Superior, antiquities of, v, 111

Isleta (Isletta), iv, 107, 216; vi, 687
- population, i, 519; iii, 633; vi, 687, 709
- possible identity, iv, 34
- Tigouex identified as, iv, 39
- *See also* Ystete.

Israelites, reference to Indian descent from, iii, 228
- *See also* Hebrew origin; Jewish customs; Lost Tribes of Israel.

Issati. *See* Isanyati.

Itasca Lake, description of, i, 147, 148
- expedition to, vi, 450, 451–452
- illustration of, i, 147; vi, 452
- natural history of, i, 148
- the source of the Mississippi, i, 185

It-chit-a-bud-ah, a Comanche division, ii, 128
- meaning of name, ii, 128

Iten Itza, Toltec element in ruins of, v, 106

Itineraries of journeys in the Alleghany region, iii, 347–351

Ixistinieses Indians, iv, 555

J

Jacarillas. *See* Jicarillas.

Jack of the Feather. *See* Nemattanow.

Jackson (Gen., President), Andrew, iv, 630
- campaign of, against the Indians, vi, 370–373
- contact of, with the Indians, iii, 26
- Creeks defeated by, vi, 367
- extracts from message of, to Congress, vi, 428–430, 432–436, 477–478
- Indian affairs under, vi, 428–481
- Indian war prosecuted by, v, 45–46
- measurements of hair of, iii, 383
- Pensacola attacked by, vi, 376

Jackson, Dr., catlinite named by, ii, 512

Jackson, John, character and death of, IV, 591
"Jacob Ryerson," schooner, Eel River entered by, III, 129, 132
Jacons (Jakon), map showing location of, III, 96
  listed as a linguistic family, III, 402
  See also Youikcones.
Jakon. *See* Jacons.
James River, naming of, VI, 96
James River region, Indians of, V, 35
Jameson, Mary, IV, 563
Jamestown, Va., founding of, VI, 96
Janitos, a name for the Senecas, VI, 326
Jarvis, Dr., I, 300
  paper by, on Indian origin, V, 82
Javelin. *See* Spear.
Jeesukawin, etymology of the word, I, 388–389
  the art of prophesy, I, 358
  See also Jossakeed; Jesukawin Society.
Jefferson, Thomas, cited on Indian oratory, III, 56
  cited on mounds, IV, 125
  cited on the Eries, III, 405
  cited on Virginia tribes, V, 35, 36–37
  expeditions dispatched by, VI, 349–352
  Indian located by, V, 668
  interest of, in Indian languages, II, 356; V, 53
  mention of tables of, III, 196
  reply to Indian proposal, VI, 401–402
  state of tribes under, VI, 347–348
  vocabulary transmitted by, III, 292
Jegasaga. *See* Gegosasa.
Jelish, a linguistic family, III, 402
  See also Salish.
Jemez (Pueblo de Jemez), Hemez identified as, IV, 39
  language, V, 689
  population, I, 519
  See also Hemez; Hernes; Jenies.
Jenbocas, IV, 561
Jenies, VI, 687
  population, III, 633; VI, 687, 709
  See also Jemez.
Jenoniswani, service rendered by, IV, 325
Jerry, Capt., Chickasaw division of, I, 508
Jeskakake, VI, 214
Jessup, Maj. Gen., VI, 476, 477, 479
  reference to proclamation of, I, 281
Jesuit missionaries, among the Neutral Nation, IV, 205, 206, 207
  labors of, V, 647, 699
Jesuit missions. *See* Society of Jesus.
Jesuits, French, missionary labors of, VI, 734, 735
Jesukawin Society, assembling of, in Spring, II, 56
  See also Jeesukawin.
Jetam, Soshawnese, or Snake, population of, III, 609
Jewish customs, compared with Muscogee, I, 272
  resemblance, to Indian, I, 39, 261
Jewish descent of Indians. *See* Hebrew origin.
Jicarillas (Jacarillas, Jicarilla Apaches, Jicorillas), VI, 687
  and others, population of, V, 484
  Apache band, V, 203, 689
  brief account of, I, 243
  chief of, V, 206
  country occupied by, IV, 216, 217
  included with Apaches, VI, 686
  mention of dialect of, V, 203
  population, I, 243, 245, 519
  range, V, 206
  ruins in range of, V, 208
Jim Boy, of Cleu wathta Town, IV, 575
Jiraras, location of, III, 533
Joe, Rogue River Chief, claims of, III, 155
Jogues, VI, 734
Johnson, Adams, paper by, on languages of California, IV, 406–415
  report by, on Sacramento Valley Indians, VI, 710
  vocabularies furnished by, III, 405
Johnson, Capt., land granted to, V, 235
Johnson, Guy, activities of, during Revolutionary War, VI, 282, 283
Johnson, John, Esq., reference to children of, VI, 464
Johnson, Sir John, battle of forces under, VI, 309
  commander at siege of Fort Stanwix, VI, 292
  flight to Canada, VI, 278, 283

Johnson, Sir John—Continued
  foray led by, on Schoharie Valley, vi, 314
    on Mohawk Valley, vi, 313
  retreat from Fort Stanwix, vi, 290
Johnson, M. H., statistics furnished by, vi, 718
Johnson, P. O., attempt of, to establish mission, v, 188
Johnson, Col. Richard, vi, 363
Johnson, Hon. Robert, v, 450
Johnson, Dr. Samuel, vi, 510
Johnson, Rev. William, missionary labors of, vi, 543–544
Johnson, Sir William, v, 109, 512, 525; vi, 256, 404
  ability and influence of, vi, 282
  activities, among the Indians, vi, 232–233
  attempt to capture Crown Point, vi, 220
  authority in Indian affairs, vi, 216
  census undertaken by, vi, 270
  council held by, vi, 132–133, 252, 253
  death of, vi, 278, 282
  grant to, iii, 99
  Indian population estimated by, vi, 272
  influence with Iroquois, vi, 209–211
  mention of work of, vi, 237
  policy of, iv, 481; vi, 223–224, 267–268
  speech to the Indians, vi, 225–226, 229–231, 235
  war prosecuted by, vi, 234
Johnson, U. S. Agent, vocabulary by, ii, 494
Johnson Hall, capture by revolutionists, vi, 278, 283
Johnson's Straits, Indians of, v, 488
Johnston, Adam, Bonaks described by, iv, 221
Johnston, George, iii, 85
  tradition supplied by, i, 302
  translations by, iii, 419; iv, 534
  vocabulary by, ii, 458
Johnston, Miss Jane, vi, 566
Johnston, John, brief account of, iii, 546
  letters of, ii, 522–525
  quoted on the Shawanoes, i, 19
  trading establishment of, vi, 398
  version of Indian war-song by, v, 526–527
Johnston, W., vocabulary by, ii, 458
Joliet, Sieur, v, 108
  explorations of, v, 648
Jomard, M., v, 88
  characters identified by, i, 107
  mention of theory of, v, 396
  opinion of, on inscription, i, 122
  suggestion made by, v, 86
Jones, C. C., acknowledgment to, iii, 376
Jones, D. R. Floyd, petition signed by, iii, 618
Jones, Rev. Evan, iv, 385
Jones, John, translation by, iv, 531, 532
Jones, Rev. Peter, work of, iv, 531–535
Jones, Capt. Robert M., iv, 583
Joques, Father, reference to murder of, vi, 139
Jordan, A. L., petition signed by, iii, 618
Jornado del Muerto, disappearing river near, iv, 34
José Marie, chief of Ionies and others, v, 712
Jossakeed or seer, classification, ii, 223–224
  explanation of functions, v, 445
  office of, i, 359, 413; iv, 492
  performance at lodge of, iv, 491; v, 421–423
  power and functions of, v, 405, 422, 423, 445
  secret society of, v, 71
  See also Jugglers; Meda; Priests; Prophets.
Journal of Caleb Swan, v, 253–255
Judith River, tribes of, vi, 698
Jugglers, activities of, iv, 495
  harm done by, iv, 637
  influence of, ii, 189
  methods in curing the sick, ii, 180–181, 198–199
  See also Priests; Magicians.
Jullien, John, treaty concluded by, v, 677
Jumanos. *See* Humanos.
Jumbuicrariri, map showing location of, iii, 96

Jumonville, defeat of, vi, 215
Juparivi, population of, i, 519

K

Kaadg ett ee, a Stikeen River tribe, v, 489
  census, v, 489
Kaas ka qua tee, a Stikeen River tribe, v, 489
  census, v, 489
Kabaun, a mythological character, v, 409
Kadapaws, probably the Catawbas, iii, 292
Ka-da-wa-be-da, brief biography of, ii, 160–161
Kadiac Island, classification of language of, iii, 401
Kadohadacho. *See* Cadrons.
Kagonamok, Mandan chief, iii, 249
Kagwatosa's Band, census of, i, 458–467
Kah-da-waub-e-da, peace mission of, ii, 158
Kahkwas. *See* Kahquas.
Kah lis pelm. *See* Kullas Palus.
Kahokias. *See* Cahokias.
Kah-po-sia (Kaposia, Ka-po-sia), ii, 167
  aims of mission at, v, 697
  origin of name, ii, 171
  See also Little Crow's band.
Kahquas (Kahkwas), conquered by Senecas, iv, 606
  possible identity of, iii, 290, 291; iv, 197
  Seneca name for Andastes, iii, 290, 291
  Seneca name for Eries, vi, 149
Kahruk, application of name, iii, 151
Kahtai, a S'klallam band, v, 703
  location, v, 703; vi, 703
  population, v, 491, 703; vi, 703
Kahuncles, location, iii, 571
  population, iii, 571
Kah-win-dum-a-win-so, chief of Sandy Lake band, ii, 161
Kaigani. *See* Ky gargey.
Kainah. *See* Blood Indians.
Kai-na-meah (Kai-no-meahs), opposition to removal, iii, 112
  territory of, iii, 102
Kaipetl (tribe), a Klamath River tribe, iii, 634
Kai-petl (village), burning of, iii, 139
  on Klamath River, iii, 138
Kaisun. *See* Kish a win.
Kai-zhe-osh, Chief, mention of, i, 419
Ka-kaik-o-gwun-na-osh, Chief, mention of, i, 419
Kake Indians, census, v, 489
  language, v, 489
Kakwas, members of Erie league, ii, 344
Kalapooian family. *See* Kalapuya.
Kalapooyahs. *See* Kalapuya.
Kalapuya (Kalapooyahs), a linguistic family, iii, 402
  head flattening among, ii, 326
  See also Calapooya.
Kalawatset. *See* Killawatts.
Kalispel. *See* Calapelins; Coospellar; Kullas Palus; Pend d'Oreilles; Ponderas.
Ka-manito-wee, iii, 366
  meaning of name, iii, 366
Kamantowit, Algonquin god, i, 286; v, 39
  analysis of words, v, 39
Kamiah. *See* Kimooenim band.
Kanadaseagea, former Indian name of Geneva, N. Y., vi, 310
Kanawaga, a name for the St. Lawrence, vi, 33
  tribes on, vi, 301
Kanchati. *See* Ecumchate.
Kancho, an Athapascan tribe, iii, 542
  population, ii, 28
Kandouche (Kandoucho), a town of the Neutral Nation, iv, 206, 207
Kaninahoick, country occupied by, iii, 596
  population, iii, 596, 609
  See also Arapaho.
Kansa, given as a synonym of Arkansas (State), iii, 537
Kansa. *See* Kansas tribe.
Kansas River, map of, i, 159
Kansas (Kanzas) Territory, data on land of, v, 501
  Delawares in, v, 142
  tribes, condition of, vi, 536–551
    description, v, 485
    indigenous to, vi, 536
    transferred to, vi, 536

Kansas (Kansies, Kanzas, Kanzes, Kasas) tribe, III, 557; VI, 423, 522, 687
  affiliations, IV, 550
  appropriations for, II, 564
  classification, I, 197; III, 402
  condition, general, VI, 543
  description, IV, 467
  De Soto in the range of, II, 35
  fiscal statistics relating to, VI, 720, 722, 723
  French relations with, VI, 237
  funds required for, II, 569
  identical with Cayas, IV, 310
  indigenous to Kansas, VI, 536
  lack of advancement, IV, 485
  lands of, IV, 572
    ceded by, II, 603; V, 451; VI, 459
    purchased from, II, 599
    statistics on, II, 605
  location, III, 577, 594; IV, 461, 486; V, 495; VI, 410, 705
    map showing, III, 96; VI, 519
  manner of living, VI, 481
  map showing colony of, IV, 180
  migration legend of, V, 98
  population, I, 523; III, 480, 594, 609; IV, 572; V, 495; VI, 687, 705
  tin ore obtained by, I, 158, 159
  See also Canses; Kaws; Okanis.
Kansas Valley, mineral resources of, I, 157
Kansies. *See* Kansas tribe.
Kanzas Agency, tribes embraced in, IV, 466
Kanzas Half-Breed Tract, extent of, V, 496
Kanzas province, sought by De Soto, III, 50
Kanzas schools, investments for, II, 562
Kanzas tribe. *See* Kansas tribe.
Kanzes. *See* Kansas tribe.
Kaôs, name for Cahokia, III, 354
Kapahas (Kiapaha), Classification of, IV, 321
  De Soto's encounter with, VI, 66
  identified as Quappas, IV, 310, 591; V, 98, 495
  See also Quapaw.
Kaposia, Ka-po-sia. *See* Kah-po-sia.
Kapozha. *See* Kah-po-sia; Little Crow's band.
Ka-quaith(s), a S'klallam band, V, 703
  location, V, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 491, 703; VI, 703
Kaquatka, stronghold of the Eries, IV, 200, 201
  supposed location of, IV, 201
  the modern Buffalo, IV, 200
Karamee, Chief, III, 281
Karankawa. *See* Carankoways.
Karok. *See* Kahruk; Pehtsik.
Karrakonta, Chief, V, 164
Kasas. *See* Kansas tribe.
Kasihta. *See* Cassita town; Cussetaw; Cussitahs.
Kaskaias, country occupied by, III, 596
  listed as a linguistic family, III, 402
  population, III, 596, 609
Kaskakoedi. *See* Kaaskaquatee.
Kaskaski. *See* Kaskaskias.
Kaskaskia language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341
Kaskaskia River, reference to tumuli on, IV, 128
Kaskaskia (town), capture of, by Gen. Clarke, VI, 302–303
  remains of, IV, 135
  trading post at, VI, 185, 196, 269
Kaskaskias (Kaskaski, Kaskaskies, Kaskasquias), VI, 687
  and others, dwelling grounds of, VI, 714
    fiscal statistics on, VI, 721, 723
    hunting grounds of, VI, 714
  annuities of, II, 584, 588, 589
  classification, II, 36; V, 145
  condition, general, IV, 467, 468
    report on, VI, 547
  creation myth, IV, 135–136
  descendants of Illinese, I, 59; V, 192
  descendants of mound-builders, IV, 135
  De Soto among, III, 50; VI, 66
  division of the Illinese, V, 41
  friendly to the French, VI, 237
  lands of, IV, 572
    ceded by, II, 603
    claimed by, III, 584
    disposal of, V, 496
    permanently granted to, V, 457
    purchased from, II, 593, 598, 600
    statistics on, II, 605

Kaskaskias—Continued
  location, III, 559, 584, 593; IV, 461; VI, 33, 705, 714
    maps showing, III, 96; IV, 180; VI, 519
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 735
  peace sought by, VI, 343
  Pontiac's death charged to, II, 308
  population, I, 523; III, 584, 593; IV, 572; VI, 272, 687, 705, 714
  removal, VI, 516, 536
    plans for, III, 576, 577
  tradition of, VI, 600
  treaty with, V, 496, 497, 499
  warriors, estimate of, III, 555, 559
  See also Peorias and Kaskaskias.
Kaskaskies. *See* Kaskaskias.
Kaskasquias. *See* Kaskaskias.
Katakas, treaty with, VI, 489
Katawabata, brief account of, III, 360
Katawabeda, Chief, I, 142; VI, 386
Katcadi. *See* Kaadgettee.
Katch ar tus tun nuck ee, a Coweta Town chief, IV, 579
Kathlamet, mentioned as Spokans, VI, 687
  See also Cathlamet.
Kathlaminimin. *See* Clannarminnamuns.
Kathlamit. *See* Cathlamet.
Katimin. *See* Sche-woh.
Kato. *See* Baten-da-kai-ee.
Kaucamagus, Chief, V, 237
Kauhuk. *See* Kahuncles.
Kaukanauka, Cusic's name for Kienuka (q. v.), IV, 199
Kauweh, a village and tribe on Klamath River, III, 138, 634
Kaukwas, a tribe of the Neutral Nation, II, 86
Kaunaumeek, missionary work at, VI, 734
Kawchodinne. *See* Hare Indians; Kancho.
Kawia. *See* Cah-wee-os.
Kawita. *See* Canitas; Caouitas; Cowetas.
Kaws, French nickname for Kanzas, V, 495
Kaws, etc.—Continued
  Pawnees attacked by, IV, 593
  See also Kansas.
Kay, Alexander, death of, III, 369
  voyage of, III, 355–369
Kay, W., III, 353
Kayaguas (Kayugas, Kayuguas), brief account of, I, 244
  population, I, 245, 519
  See also Kiowas.
Kayashata, Seneca chief, IV, 269, 270, 272, 273, 278
Kayugas, Kayuguas. *See* Kayaguas.
Kearns, Mr., Coronado's march charted by, VI, 71
  See also Kern, Richard H.
Kearny, Brig. Gen., reference to, I, 242
Keawas, country occupied by, III, 596
  population, III, 596, 609
  See also Kiowas.
Kebiks, meaning of name, V, 40
  See also Montagnais.
Ke-che-ba-be-se-gun-dib-a, II, 159
  brief biography of, II, 161–162
Ke-che-waub-ish-ash, an Ojibwa warrior, II, 157
  exploit of, II, 165
Kechies. *See* Keechies.
Kee ches, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
  census, V, 487
Keechies (Kechies, Kitchies, Koechies), I, 237; III, 403; VI, 687
  and others, location, VI, 705
    population, VI, 705
  population, I, 518; III, 635; V, 702; VI, 687, 699, 708
Kee chum a kar lo, a Skeena River tribe, V, 487
  census, V, 487
Keek heat la, census of, V, 487
  location, V, 487
Keeler, Mr., antiquities belonging to, II, 90–91
Keen ath toix, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
  census, V, 487
Kee tah hon neet, census of, V, 489
  language, V, 489
Keewaygooshkum, treaty discussed by, VI, 395
Keissnautchta, at conference with Col. Bouquet, VI, 261

Kekeenowin (kekenowin, ke-kee-(no)-wins, ke-ke-no-win-un), best examples of pictographic art, VI, 606
  pictographs of instruction, I, 351, 361, 382, 405
  prophetic devices, I, 113
  See also Kekeewin.
Kekeewin (kekewin), explanation of the term, I, 46, 112, 338, 351, 382, 405; V, 76, 245; VI, 605–606
  inscriptions in symbolic character of, IV, 119, 120; VI, 605
  See also Kekeenowin.
Kelelimand, chief, V, 141
Kelistenos. *See* Kenistenos.
Kellbuck, treaty signed by, VI, 303
Kelsey, Andrew, murder of, III, 109
Kelsey, Benjamin, III, 155, 161, 167, 170, 173
  guide of expedition, III, 133
  information supplied by, III, 108
Kel ut sah, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
  census, V, 487
Kemble, G., petition signed by, III, 618
Kemp, Jackson, IV, 583
Kenabeca, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Kenabik, a type of evil, IV, 664
Kenai, classification of, III, 401
Ken chen Kieg, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
  census, V, 487
Kendrick, Francis Patrick, report on missions, V, 699
Kenhulka, a Creek town, V, 262
Kenisteno, Chief, I, 418
Kenistenos (Kelistenos, Killisteneaux), a name for the Cree, V, 41; VI, 205, 686
  beliefs of, V, 172
  ceremony of, VI, 627
  clothing of, V, 165–166
  customs of, V, 166–171
  distinct dialect of, II, 358
  general account of, V, 164–172
  language of, V, 164
  migrations, reference to, II, 32
  origin and meaning of the name, V, 145, 164
  physical characteristics of, V, 165, 166
  sacred fire ceremonies of, V, 65–66
Kenistenos—Continued
  territory occupied by, V, 164–165; VI, 33
  warriors, estimate of, III, 556
  See also Cree Indians.
Kennebec, VI, 174
Kennebec (Kennebeck) River, discovery of ruins on, VI, 608
  Indians living on, V, 218
Kenouchamek, speech by, at council with Pontiac, II, 284–285
Kenrick, Archbishop Francis P., cited on Catholic missions, V, 503
  report on missions, V, 699
Kentucky, a neutral war-ground, VI, 32
  admission to the Union, VI, 393
  character of settlers in, III, 342
  emigration to, III, 346
  Indians of, I, 300–301; VI, 32
  journal of journey to, III, 337–346
  population and area of, IV, 610
  project for settlement of, VI, 263–264
Keokuk, Fox chief, III, 281
  stature of, IV, 349
Keowe, reference to sepulchre at, V, 115
Ke par yar tus tun nuck ee, chief at Eufaula, IV, 580
Kepel. *See* Kai-petl.
Keresan. *See* Chu-cha-cas; Kes-whaw-hay.
Kern, Benjamin, mention of death of, IV, 597
Kern, E. M., Indian customs described by, V, 649–650
Kern, Richard H., map by, of Coronado's route, IV, 39
  murder of, by Indians, IV, 551, 597
  opinion on Coronado's route, IV, 24, 32
  pictographs copied by, IV, 254
  quoted on pictographs, IV, 253
  reference to work of, IV, 597
Kerokias, number of warriors of, III, 555
  See also Cahokias.
Kershaws, reference to extinct dialect of, II, 344
  See also Catawba.
Kes-whaw-hay language, Pueblos speaking, V, 689
Ket an dou, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
  census, V, 487

Ke-taw-kah, murder by, of Dr. Madison, III, 279
Ke toon ok shelk, a tribe of Nass Indians, V, 487
  census, V, 487
Kettel and Moore, Messrs., III, 384
Kettle band, a Titon division, III, 629
Kettle Falls Indians, map showing location of, III, 200
  population, I, 521
  See also Colville.
Ke-tun-e-see, a Comanche chief, V, 683
Ket wilk ci pa, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
  census, V, 487
Kewywenon, III, 367
Khabenapo. *See* Habe-napo.
Khemnichan. *See* Hamine-chan; Red Wing band.
Khesetoa, a town of the Neutral Nation, IV, 207
Ki a li ge, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Kiamulga, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Kiantwauka, Indian name of Cornplanter, VI, 326
Kiapaha. *See* Kapahas.
Kiataws, brief description of, III, 83
  See also Coyoteros.
Kiaways, listed as a linguistic family, III, 402
  See also Kiowas.
Kichai. *See* Hitchies; Keechies.
Kickapoo language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341
Kickapoos, III, 278; VI, 452, 687
  agricultural labor, VI, 481
  alliance with Menomonie, I, 304
  and others, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
    hunting grounds, VI, 714
    population, VI, 714
  annuities of, II, 587, 589
  census, I, 488–497; III, 621–628
  classification, II, 36; III, 401; V, 145
  condition, after removal, VI, 542, 544
    general, IV, 466
  fiscal statistics relating to, VI, 721, 723
  French relations with, VI, 237
  funds required for, II, 569
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  intruders in Texas, I, 240
Kickapoos—Continued
  lands of, IV, 572
    ceded by, II, 603
    claimed by, III, 585
    conveyed permanently to, V, 457
    purchased from, II, 593, 595, 598, 600
    statistics on, II, 605
  location, I, 488; III, 559, 585, 592; IV, 461; V, 495; VI, 705, 714
    map showing, III, 96; IV, 180; VI, 519
  Miamies aided by, VI, 335
  missionary work among, VI, 739, 740
  name, discussion of, IV, 256
    supposed meaning of, V, 40
    synonomy, V, 41
  peace sought by, VI, 343, 364
  population, I, 523; III, 585, 592, 609, 610; IV, 572; V, 495; VI, 272, 687, 705, 714
  relations with Mascoutins, IV, 245; VI, 204
  removal, V, 495; VI, 536
    condition after, VI, 542, 544
    plans for, III, 576, 577
  reservation ceded by, VI, 397
  supposed identity, V, 495
  traditional origin, IV, 255
  treaty with, V, 496, 497, 499; VI, 380, 445
  war with Chickasaws, I, 311
  warriors, number of, III, 554, 555, 559; VI, 271
  See also Kicopoux.
Kick sa tee, a Stikeen River tribe, V, 489
  census, V, 489
Kickuallis Indians, language of, IV, 600
  location of, IV, 598
  population of, IV, 598
  See also Kikiallis.
Kicopoux, a form of the name Kickapoo, IV, 256
  totems of, III, 554
  See also Kickapoos.
Kidder, Frederic, vocabulary prepared by, V, 690
Kidnapping of Indians, II, 20, 35–36

Kienuka (Kinuka), an Erie village, VI, 148
 location of, IV, 199; VI, 148
 mention of, III, 290; VI, 185
Kigaschuta, a Seneca chief, VI, 261
 speech made by, VI, 262
Kikatsik. *See* O-de-eilah.
Kikiallis (Kikialis) Indians, location, V, 704; VI, 703
 population, V, 491, 704; VI, 703
 See also Kickuallis.
Kikiallis River, tribe on, VI, 703
Kikiallu. *See* Kickuallis; Kikiallis.
Kiksadi. *See* Kicksatee.
Kilamukes. *See* Killamucks.
Kil ca tah, a division of the Sabassas, V, 487
 census, V, 487
Kilelimand, IV, 614
Kiliga Town, a Creek town, IV, 576
 chiefs of, IV, 576
Killamuck language, nations speaking, III, 571
Killamucks (Kilamukes, Killamuks, Killemooks), III, 224; VI, 687
 head-flattening among, II, 326
 location, III, 201, 571
 Lower, classification of, III, 402
 population, I, 521; III, 201, 571, 609; VI, 687
 Upper, classification of, III, 402
 See also Tillamooks.
Killamuks. *See* Killamucks.
Killawatts, location of, III, 571
 population, III, 571
Killaxthocles (Killaythocles), location of, III, 571
 population of, III, 571, 609
Killaythocles. *See* Killaxthocles.
Killeegko, a Creek town, V, 262
Killemooks. *See* Killamucks.
Killers, a synonym of Kenistenos (q. v.), V, 145
Killisteneaux. *See* Kenistenos.
Kilutsai. *See* Kel ut sah.
Kimi-ke-chawgon, or Big Nose, signature of, II, 226
Kimooenim band, location of, III, 570
 population, III, 570
Kimsquit. *See* Kui much qui toch.
Kinagingeeg. *See* Kenchen Kieg.
Kin a wa lax, a tribe of Nass Indians, V, 487
 census, V, 487
"King," Indian, use of the title by early writers, III, 41
King Hagler, assassination of, III, 295
 effect of death of, III, 295
King Hendrick (Hendric), anecdote concerning, IV, 481
 at battle of Lake George, VI, 287
 brief description, VI, 220
 death, V, 44; VI, 281
 Gen. Johnson aided by, VI, 220
 Indian name of, VI, 220
 portrait of, VI, 220
 present at conference, V, 667
King Philip, IV, 631; V, 121; VI, 173
 a Pokanoket, V, 130
 character and ability, VI, 172
 death, VI, 171
 description, VI, 151
 Indian name of, VI, 115
 origin of name, VI, 115
 tribal position, IV, 481
 See also King Philip's War; Pometacom.
King Philip's War, account of, VI, 153–172
 results, I, 287
Kingsborough, Lord, mention of theory of, V, 396
 reference to collection of, VI, 604, 605, 646
 suggestion made by, V, 86
Kingsbury, Rev. C., quoted on the Choctaws, IV, 586; VI, 524–525
King's River, Indian population at, VI, 715
 vocabulary from, IV, 413–414
King's River Reservation, report on conditions at, VI, 716
Kinjockety, Susan, mention of family of, VI, 718
Kinkla Indians, location, III, 201
 population, III, 201
Kinnard, Jack (John), V, 254, 256
 account of, V, 260–261
Kinship. *See* Relationship.
Kinuhtoiah. *See* Keen ath toix.
Kinuka. *See* Kienuka.
Kinzie, Mr., the patriarch of Chicago, IV, 193

Kiowa Apache. *See* Kaskaias; Katakas.
Kiowas (Kioways), IV, 469; VI, 687, 708
    location, VI, 705
        map showing, III, 96
    Pawnees attacked by, IV, 593
    population, I, 518, 523; VI, 687, 705, 708
    treaty with, VI, 489
    See also Kayaguas; Keawas; Kiaways.
Kipp, James, vocabulary collected by, III, 252, 446
Kirkland, Charles P., petition signed by, III, 618
Kirkland, Samuel, V, 506, 520; VI, 312, 321
    influence among Oneidas, V, 512–513
    missionary labors of, V, 515; VI, 277, 734, 736
Kish a win, census of, V, 489
    language, V, 489
    location, V, 489
Kish-kemanisee, I, 304
Kishpachlaots. *See* Kispachalaidy.
Kiskokans, a branch of the Ottowas, III, 554
Kispachalaidy, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kit a hon, a tribe of Nass Indians, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kitamat. *See* Kittamaat.
Kitch a clalth, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kitchies. *See* Keechies.
Kite Indians. *See* Marlain.
Kit ha teen, a tribe of Nass Indians, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kithlipecanuk town, location of, VI, 335
Kitkahta. *See* Kilcatah.
Kitkatla. *See* Keek heat la.
Kitlakdamix. *See* Kin a wa lax.
Kit lan, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kitlani. *See* Kit lan.
Kit lope, a division of the Sabassas, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kitsalthlal. *See* Kitch a clalth.
Kit se lai so, a Skeena River tribe, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kit ta maat, a division of the Sabassas, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kituanaha, a linguistic family, III, 402
Kitunaha tribe, population of, V, 707
Kitunahan Family. *See* Kituanaha.
Kitunto. *See* Ket an dou.
Kitwilgioks. *See* Kit will coits.
Kitwilksheba. *See* Ketwilkcipa.
Kit will coits, a Chimsyan tribe, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kitwinshilk. *See* Ke toon ok shelk.
Kitzeesh. *See* Kee ches.
Kitzilas. *See* Kitselaiso.
Kiyuksa. *See* Ku-ux-aws; Wabushaw band.
Klamath Indians (Klamets), application of name, III, 138
    condition, III, 152
    location, III, 201; V, 493
        maps showing, III, 96, 200
    population, III, 201; V, 493
    war of extermination against, III, 210
    See also Clamets; Klamath River tribes.
Klamath Reservation, conditions at, VI, 717
    population, VI, 715
Klamath River, description of, III, 135–137
Klamath River tribes, detailed account of, III, 138–144
    list of, III, 634
    population, III, 138, 156, 634
    villages, III, 138
Klatsops. *See* Clatsops.
Klatsop language, brief vocabulary of, III, 223–224
Klen ee kate language, tribes speaking, V, 489
Klikatats, population, V, 490, 705, 707; VI, 700
Klikitat. *See* Clickatats; Klikatats; Vancouvers.
Kloo. *See* Cloo.
Klumaitumsh. *See* Clamoctomichs.
Kluneolux, evil spirit of the Iroquois, VI, 630
Knife cases, ornamented, illustration of, II, 561
    See also Knives.

Knife handle, illustration of, IV, 175
Knife Hills, country of, described, IV, 296–299
Knistenaux (Knistenos, Knistinaux), III, 539
    classification, III, 401
    color of hair, II, 322
    enemies of the Chippewyans, V, 176
    population, III, 593
    tattooing among, V, 216
    See also Cree Indians.
Knistenos. *See* Knistenaux.
Knistinaux. *See* Knistenaux.
Knives, materials used in making, I, 92
    Peruvian bronze, IV, 439–440
    Shoshonee, obsidian, I, 213
    See also Knife cases; Knife handle.
Knox, opinion, regarding Peruvian skulls, II, 326
Knox, Gen. Henry (Sec. of War), V, 667; VI, 338
    letter to, from Caleb Swan, V, 251–252
    treaties negotiated by, VI, 332, 404
Koasati. *See* Coosadas; Coshattas; Cush-eh-tah.
Koechies. *See* Keechies.
Koeksotenok. *See* Quick sut i nut.
Koetenay or Skaisi, map showing location of, III, 200
    See also Kutenai.
Ko ho mut ki garts kar, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Kokaitk. *See* Kokwaiytoch.
Kok wai y toch, a Milbank Sound tribe, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Koluschan family. *See* Koulischen.
Koluschan language. *See* Klen ee kate language.
Komkyutis. *See* Cum que kis.
Komoyue. *See* Quee he Qna colt.
Konic (Konick), mentioned as Spokans, VI, 687
    population, I, 521
Ko nip pe e marth lar, a Thlakatch ka chief, IV, 579
Konteka, Chippewa chief, assertion made by, IV, 142
Koo-che-ta-kers, a Comanche division, II, 128
    meaning of name, II, 128
Koog-ay-ray-kaw's Band, census of, I, 498–507
Kook a tee, a Stikeen River tribe, V, 489
    census, V, 489
Koolsaticara (Koolsatik-ara), VI, 687
    population, I, 522
    See also Kotsoteka.
Kootenais (Kootoonais), VI, 699
    population, V, 707
    See also Kutenai.
Koquathaheelon, influence used by, VI, 300–301
    treaty signed by, VI, 303
Kose-tah, a Shaste Valley band, III, 171
Koskimo. *See* Kus ke mu.
Kosotshe. *See* Luckkarso.
Kotch ar har jo, chief at Chehawah, IV, 580
Kotsoteka. *See* Cools-on-tick-ara; Koo-che-ta-kers; Koolsaticara.
Kotzebue's Sound, classification of language of, III, 401
Koulischen, a linguistic family, III, 402
Koutaines, VI, 700
    See also Kutenai.
Kow welth, census of, V, 489
    language, V, 489
    location, V, 489
Kueha. *See* Quie ha Ne cub ta.
Kuhlanapo. *See* Hula-napo; Kula-napo.
Kui much qui toch, a Milbank Sound tribe, V, 487
    census, V, 487
Kukunshawinin, an Ojibwa war leader, II, 155
Kula-napo, a Clear Lake band, III, 421
    See also Hula-napo.
Kula-napo language, vocabulary of, III, 428–434
Kullas Palus (Kahlispelm), population of, V, 707
    See also Kalispel.
Kunaloa, meaning of name, IV, 490
Kun-de-kund, Chief, I, 418, 419
Kus ke mu, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 489
    census, V, 489
Kutauwa. *See* Neeketoos.
Kutchin. *See* Loo-choos.
Kutenai. *See* Contamis; Cootenays; Cotonay; Coutaria; Koetenay or Skaisi; Kootenais; Koutaines.

- Ku-ux-aws, a Yankton band, II, 169
  - territory occupied by, II, 169
- Kwaiailk. *See* Staktamish.
- Kwakiutl. *See* Quacolth.
- Kwalhioqua. *See* Quillequaquas; Quillequegaws; Quilleoueoquas.
- Kwäsind, power of, I, 82
- Kwatami. *See* Quahtoma; Saquaacha.
- Kwehtlmamish. *See* N'quutl-ma-mish.
- Kweundlas. *See* Quiahanless.
- Kworatem. *See* Quoratem.
- Kwusathlkhuntunne. *See* Cosulhentan.
- Ky gargey Indians, V, 489
  - census of, V, 489
  - division, V, 489
  - language, V, 489
  - location, V, 489

L

- La Barre, V, 121; VI, 190
- Laboise, Mr., II, 264
- Labor, among Apachees, V, 695
  - among Comanches, II, 132
  - among Dakotas, II, 188
  - attitude toward, II, 188, 548; IV, 67, 68, 461; VI, 508, 566
  - combined, evidence of, II, 31
  - division of, II, 63–64, 132, 188; III, 191, 211, 235; IV, 221–222
  - of Aztec women, IV, 444
  - of Creek women, V, 274, 275
  - of Massachusetts Indians, I, 285
  - of Navajo women, IV, 214, 217
  - voluntary nature of, II, 64
- Labrador, classification of language of, III, 401
- Labrosse, M., II, 273
- La Butte, M., interpreter at siege of Detroit, II, 247, 279
  - negotiation, with Indians, II, 255, 256, 257
- Labyrinth, described by Pimas, III, 305
  - illustration of, III, 305
- Laclede, Maxan, and Co., V, 186
- Lac-qui-Parle, mission at, V, 697
- Ladies of the Sacred Heart, missionary work of, V, 699
- Laek que lib la, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  - census, V, 488
- Lafitau, quoted on Indian mentality, III, 55
- La Fraumbois, Miss Madeline, VI, 566
- Lagard, Father, death of, VI, 647
- Laguna (pueblo), IV, 216
  - description, IV, 75–76
  - illustration showing, IV, 72
  - language, V, 689
  - population, I, 519; III, 633
- Laguna Pueblos, VI, 687
  - population, VI, 687, 709
- Lahanna, location, III, 572
  - population, III, 572, 609
- Lahontan, Baron, reference to arguments of, V, 524
  - travels of, I, 136
- Lake Athabasca, Indians of, V, 172
- Lake Calhoun Band, a Medawakanton band, III, 613
  - census, I, 498–507
- Lake Champlain, Indians of, VI, 147
- Lake Coshkinong, headquarters of Black Hawk, VI, 453
- Lake Erie, antiquities of, II, 85–88
  III 85-87
  - called Okswago, IV, 382
  - fort commanding, VI, 198
  - inscription on island in, VI, 605–606
  - tribes of, V, 137; VI, 714
- Lake George, battle at, VI, 287
  - naming of, VI, 220
- Lake Harriet, school at, V, 697
- Lake Huron, arrival at, of the French, VI, 206
  - former name of, VI, 201, 202
  - forts commanding, VI, 198
  - origin of name, IV, 382–383
  - remains on island in, I, 102–103
  - tribes of, VI, 33, 204, 714
- Lake Huron Chippewas, census of, I, 458–467
- Lake Huron island, Indian name for, IV, 491
- Lake Indians (Chippewas), population of, VI, 692
- Lake Itasca. *See* Itasca Lake.
- Lake Julia, naming of, I, 143
- Lake Michigan, basin of, IV, 193
  - forts commanding, VI, 198
  - Indians of, V, 191; VI, 33, 206, 714
  - origin of name, V, 191
- Lake Nepissing, Indians of, V, 143; VI, 33
- Lake of the Woods, Indians of, VI, 33, 205

Lake Ontario, forts commanding, vi, 198
  Indian name of, iv, 382
  tribes dwelling on, vi, 714
Lake, refractions of light at, i, 172
Lake St. Clair, tribes on, vi, 33
  See also Lake Sinclair.
Lake Sinclair, probable origin of name, vi, 256
Lake Superior, copper mining in region of, i, 95–100
  effect on, of geological action, i, 167–168
  forts commanding, vi, 198
  geology of region, iv, 190–192
  Indians of, v, 143, 184; vi, 34, 714
  physical features, iv, 187
  surveys in region of, iv, 190
Lake Tezcoco, founding of Aztec capital in, v, 96
Lake Winnebago, Stockbridges on, vi, 504
Lake Winnebigoshish band, annuities paid to, vi, 723
Lake Winnepek, tribes on, vi, 33
Lake Winnepesaukee, Indian fishing place at, v, 225, 226
Lake Winnibeegish, Indians of, v, 185
Lake Winnipeg, evacuated by the Sioux, ii, 151
Lakes, North American, geological action of, i, 166–172
Lakmiut. *See* Suchamier.
Lallemand, vi, 734
Lallemant, Père Jerome, quoted on Indian mentality, iii, 56
"Lama Virginia," arrival of, at Humboldt Bay, iii, 131
Lamberville, Father (missionary), Indian name of, vi, 141
  quoted on Indian warfare, vi, 144
Lamy, Bishop (Joseph), v, 689, 699
Lancaster, Mass., attack on, by Indians, vi, 164
Lancaster, Pa., Indian treaty made at, vi, 136
Lances, described, i, 78
  use of, in buffalo hunt, iv, 96
Land, amount of, required for Indian family, ii, 188; v, 485
  beliefs concerning ownership of, ii, 194; v, 458
Land—Continued
  Creek attitude toward, i, 277
  rights to, i, 224; ii, 131
Land cessions, by Indians in Illinois and Michigan, vi, 393–395
  See also under tribal names.
Lands, Indian, absorption of, iv, 180
  acreage of, iii, 581
  amount, ceded by Indians, iii, 94
  area of, estimated, iv, 459
    total, iv, 183
  boundaries, adjustment of, vi, 455–456
  changes in, v, 121, 122
  claimed by Indian tribes, iii, 583–586
  colonists' policy regarding, vi, 186
  contest for recovery of, vi, 357, 361
  desirability, vi, 263
  discussion of bill affecting, v, 451–473
  distribution, iv, 182–183
  English attitude concerning, vi, 173
  financial statement concerning, ii, 582–583
  need for permanent possession of, vi, 413
  possibilities, for agriculture, iv, 183–184
  pressure on, iv, 180–181
  purchased, estimate of, ii, 593–595
  recognition of rights to, vi, 320
  recommendations concerning, ii, 191, 548
  report of commission on, vi, 456
  report on, by Indian Bureau, vi, 414–415
  sale of, discussed, i, 279; iii, 95–96
  statements concerning, iv, 572, 573, 574
  statistics on, ii, 590–606
  table of data on, v, 501
  title to, extinguished by treaties, vi, 436
  value of, mistakes concerning, vi, 459
  See also under tribal names.
Lane, Gov. Joseph, i, 437
  population reports by, i, 521; v, 484; vi, 701–702
Lane, Gov. Wm. Carr, letter of, on New Mexico dialects, v, 689
  quoted on Apache language, v, 203

Lane, Ralph, colony established by, VI, 86
  explorations conducted by, VI, 90
Langdon, Wm. Chauncy, summary by, of missions to Indians, VI, 731–740
Language(s), as a test of national affinity, IV, 656
  as an indication of origin, V, 82
  cause of multiplication of, V, 115
  development, V, 546
  philosophy of, V, 543–548
Languages, Indian, II, 340–349; V, 289–290
  as indication of unity of tribes, V, 289–290
  bibliography of works in, IV, 523–553
  characteristics, II, 346–349
  classification, III, 397–407
  compared with Greek, V, 132–133
  compared with Hebrew, V, 82, 86
  comparisons, V, 552–558
  compounding of words in, IV, 371–385
  conclusions based on study of, VI, 673
  difficulties of recording, I, 215
  discussion of Celtic element in, IV, 118
  discussion of Welsh element in, IV, 118
  etymology of words in, I, 405
  formation of dialects of, V, 146
  importance of study of, IV, 523–524, 656–657, 660, 666
  literature of, V, 535–625
  observations on, III, 420–423
  of California, III, 126–127, 420–423; IV, 406–415
  of Puget Sound district, IV, 600
  of the south-western tribes, I, 267–268
  plan of thought of, II, 346–349
  preserved by tribes, III, 96
  principles of, III, 407–419; VI, 671–684
  study of origin based on, I, 40; V, 53
  texts in, V, 601–607
  word-composition of, V, 593–600
  work of classifying, III, 405, 406
Languages—Continued
  See also Dialects; Dictionary; Etymology; Grammatical notes; Lexicon; Linguistic notes; Literature; Vocabularies. For specific languages, *see* under tribal names.
La-pap-poos, a Tuolumne band, IV, 407
La Petite Corne, III, 364, 365
La Petite Rat, III, 360
Laplan, account of, by Scheffer, I, 425
  inscriptions from, I, 425–428
Lapointe (La Pointe), chief Ojibwa town, II, 136
  former Odjibwa council seat, V, 39
  founding of mission at, V, 648
  Indian treaty at, V, 187
  story of evacuation of post at, II, 147–148
La Pointe Chegoimegon (Chegoimiegon), Chippewa seat of government, V, 524
  Pillagers at, V, 184
La Potherie, quoted on Indian mentality, III, 56
La Purissima Concepcion, population of, I, 520
L'Arbre Croche, treaty made at, VI, 386
L'Arbre Croche Ottawas, census of, I, 478–487
Larlielo (Lartielo), location, III, 572
  population, III, 572, 609; V, 706
  See also Sinhumanish; Spokans.
La Salle, Robert, II, 30; VI, 185
  explorations of, I, 135–136; IV, 199
  importance of discoveries of, VI, 196, 197
  Michigan visited by, VI, 382
  observations of, V, 108
Lasallier, Baptiste, prominent Winnebago, described, IV, 234–235
Las Casas, Spanish policy denounced by, III, 23
  work assigned to, VI, 72
Larned, Gen., arrival of, at Fort Stanwix, VI, 290
La Sue, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  population, VI, 714
  See also Dakota.
Latham, quoted on unity of American aborigines, V, 290–292

Laticunga, mound near, described, v, 92

La Tour, Claude, land granted to, v, 675
  mention of wife of, v, 674

Laudonnière, René de, II, 22
  expedition of, VI, 74–77
  Fort Caroline erected by, VI, 743

Laughty marturhar, chief of Wewoakcar, IV, 576

Laughty micco, of Cleu wathta Town, IV, 575

Lava, pots made of, I, 211

Laval, Francis de, v, 647

Lavall, Capt., VI, 376

Lavall, V., ruins of earthworks described by, v, 663

Lavelle, L., member of expedition, III, 353

Laviollet, M., III, 355

Lawrence, Capt., IV, 629

Lawrence, Charles, treaty concluded by, v, 677

Laws of the United States, Indian attitude toward, II, 190
  recommendations concerning, II, 190, 191, 192
  regarding Indians, discussion of, I, 255–256

Lawson, John, Santees described by, VI, 182
  travels of, IV, 155–158

Layard, Mr., mention of, IV, 489, 492, 494

Layma, mention of, IV, 77

Lea, L., report of, II, 547–560

Lead mines, mention of discovery of, III, 280

Lead ore, Wisconsin and Iowa, I, 160

League of the Iroquois. *See* Iroquois Confederacy.

Leary, W. O., v, 659

Leather, articles of, made by Creeks, v, 692

Leavenworth, Col., I, 338
  Sioux language studied by, VI, 392

Le Boeuf, Fort, reference to taking of, IV, 614
  surrender of, VI, 234

Le Caron, Father, IV, 205

Le Clerc, IV, 206

L'Ecoree, totem of, III, 554

Le Cousin, III, 360
  attack of, on Mr. Kay, III, 362

Lee, Arthur, Indian Commissioner, VI, 323
  treaty concluded by, VI, 327

Lee, Charles A., petition signed by, III, 618

Lee, Elisha, v, 668

Lee, Zadock, mention of, IV, 315

Leeberkuhn, Rev. Samuel, work of, IV, 540

Leech Lake, ceremony at, v, 422, 435
  description of, v, 190–191
  Indians of, v, 145, 185, 191
  origin of name, v, 190–191
  Pillagers at, v, 185

Leech Lake Indians, population of, III, 366
  See also Pillagers.

Lee's Creek, Presbyterian station at, IV, 589

Le Fort, Abraham, Onondaga chief, III, 314
  vocabulary by, II, 482

Legends (myths, tales, traditions), Algonquin, of Bamondu, IV, 555
  Algonquin, of Bökewa, IV, 561
  Algonquin, of the mastodon, IV, 562
  and aboriginal mythology, I, 316–332
  Apache, concerning Montezuma's daughter, v, 211
  Cherokee, regarding wars, IV, 137
  Chippewa, of a hunter lad, II, 229–230
  Chippewa, of a merman, I, 417
  Chippewa, of little Monedo, III, 318–320
  Chippewa, of magic, III, 491–492
  Chippewa, of Manabosho, v, 149–150
  Chippewa, of the origin of Indian corn, II, 230–232
  Chippewa, of the Wolf-brother, II, 232–234
  concerning mound-builders, IV, 136–137
  concerning over-fasting, II, 229
  difficulties connected with, I, 65–66
  geographical features mentioned in, III, 270
  Iowa, of a deluge, III, 263
  Iroquois, of shipwreck, I, 125–126
  Mohegan, of drinking scene, II, 23–24

Legends—Continued
  of ante-Columbian epoch, I, 19–27
  of eternal fire, V, 68–69
  of European arrivals, I, 18
  of heroes, I, 18
  of Manabozho, I, 317; V, 149–150
  of origin of corn, I, 311; II, 230–232; III, 538
  of origin of Five Nations, V, 157–163, 636–646
  of origin of flint stones, I, 317
  of origin of maize and beans, IV, 343
  of origin of music, VI, 640
  of origin of tobacco, IV, 343
  of the deluge, I, 17; III, 263; IV, 230, 231; V, 31, 63, 173, 687; VI, 571–572, 638
  of the God of War, VI, 642
  of the Little Orphan, I, 329
  of the Magic Circle, I, 327
  of the monster era, I, 18
  of the settlement of North America, V, 633–635
  of the sun and moon, V, 417–419; VI, 639–640
  of warfare, II, 140–143
  of Yogowanea, IV, 199–201
  Ojibwa, compared with Hebrew history, II, 136
  place of, in aboriginal history, I, 13–14
  Seneca, of Great Snake, III, 322–323
  Seneca, regarding wars, IV, 137, 203, 345–346
  Shawanoe, of ancient Florida, III, 82
  told by Pontiac, of the Loup Indian, II, 243–247
  Toltec, of Xolotl, IV, 561
  Tuscarora, regarding white colony, IV, 117, 118
  Winnebago, mention of, III, 267
  Wyandot, of Sayadio, II, 235
  Wyandot, Trapping in Heaven, III, 320–322
  See also Migration legends; Origin traditions.
Leggins, described, III, 66–67
  illustrated, III, 66
  male and female, IV, 58
Legrand, Judge, II, 268
Leiber, Francis, paper by, on Indian languages, II, 346–349
Le Jeune, Paul, missionary work of, III, 320
Le June, Pere, quoted on Indian mentality, III, 55
Lekwiltok. *See* Laek que lib la; Neculta.
Le Moyne [Jacques], Indians delineated by, VI, 74
Le Moyne, Father Simon, IV, 208
Lenalinepies, a synonym of Delawares, V, 669
Lenape Indians (Lenapees, Lenapis, Lenni Lenapees, Lenno Lenape, Lenno Lenapi), V, 122, 147
  allies of Iroquois, VI, 176
  antecedents, V, 99
  antiquity of, I, 197
  at siege of Detroit, II, 284, 285, 301
  bands occupying New York Bay, VI, 100
  conquered by Six Nations, II, 37
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  forced migration of, IV, 280; VI, 207
  history, VI, 176–178
  migration, VI, 197
    forced, IV, 280
    tradition, IV, 147; V, 98, 134; VI, 176–177
  name for the Delawares, V, 41; VI, 687
    meaning of, V, 136; VI, 147, 177
  rank among tribes, I, 265
  reference to language, II, 36; III, 96
  reference to traditions of, IV, 136; V, 61
  stature, IV, 349
  subjugated by Iroquois, III, 196–197; VI, 195, 197
  superior physique of, V, 243–244
  tale of, told by Pontiac, II, 243–247
  territory occupied by, VI, 32, 147, 177, 207
  totems, IV, 666
  See also Delawares.
Lenapee-Algonquins, migration and division of, VI, 116
Lenapees, Lenapis. *See* Lenape Indians.

Lenni Lenapees, Lenno Lenape, Lenno Lenapees, Lenno Lenapi. *See* Lenape Indians.
Lenno Lenapean stock, tribes of, iv, 617
Lenno-Lenapi language, publications in, iv, 540–541
Lentes (Lentis, Leutis), vi, 687
  change in, v, 689
  population of, i, 519; iii, 633; vi, 687, 709
Leon, Ponce de. *See* Ponce de Leon.
Léon, M. de, appealed to, by Pontiac, ii, 267
Lepans. *See* Lipans.
Le Petit Mort, iii, 361
  wound treated by, iii, 363
Letters, steps in development of, i, 342
Leutis. *See* Lentes.
Lewis, Chief, v, 514
Lewis, Colonel, death of, vi, 266
Lewis, Gen. Andrew, expedition commanded by, vi, 266
  treaty signed before, vi, 303
Lewis, Meriwether, and Clark(e), William, ii, 29; vi, 380
  among the Mandans, iii, 249
  explorations of, vi, 349
  Indian population estimated by, v, 484
  observations of, v, 100
  route of, vi, 349
  Shoshonees described by, i, 199, 200
  tribes encountered by, vi, 349
Lewis, Gen. Thomas, treaty signed before, vi, 303
Lewis River Snakes, population, v, 493
  position, v, 493
Lewiston Indians, missionary work among, vi, 737
Lexicon, Algonquin, English-Chippewa ["A" only], v, 565–569
L'Herminier, M., ii, 320
  cranium discovered by, ii, 320
Libyan element, suggestion of, in Indian culture, v, 86
Lignite in Rocky Mountain region, i, 218
Limestone, blue, in Snake territory, i, 209
Lindley, Eleazer, v, 668
Linguistic manuscripts in preparation by Gallatin, iii, 399
Linguistic notes, i, 306, 316, 340, 354, 355, 358, 359; ii, 50, 104, 138, 160, 228, 404; iii, 61, 74, 100, 288, 298, 353, 360, 361, 366, 367–368, 491, 502, 523–524; iv, 68, 117, 199, 202, 259, 306, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 428, 432, 531–538; v, 28, 29, 36, 38, 39, 40, 105, 133, 134, 136, 148, 172, 173, 216, 217, 222, 225, 226, 227, 418, 429, 547, 578, 579, 580, 581, 584, 586, 587; vi, 52, 53, 83, 86, 137, 140, 147, 174, 177, 217, 227, 264, 278, 326, 354, 468, 483, 552, 573, 676, 681
Linguistic stocks, classification, i, 195–198; iii, 397–407
  east of the Mississippi, vi, 31
  east of the Rockies, ii, 343
  map showing location, ii, 28
  number, north of Mexico, iii, 403
  preservation, iii, 96
  See also Generic families.
Linpoilish, maps showing location of, iii, 96, 200
  See also Sanpoil.
Lipans (Lepans), iii, 403; vi, 687
  and others, estimated population of, v, 484
  brief account of, i, 239
  linguistic affinities, v, 203
  location, vi, 705
  population, i, 518; iii, 635; vi, 687, 705, 708
  result of attacks on, vi, 708
  See also Canees; Seepans.
Liquors. *See* Alcoholic liquors.
Litchfield, ancient name of, v, 225
Literature of the Indian languages, iv, 523–564
Litter, construction of, i, 254
  use of, ii, 180; iv, 243
    illustrated, ii, 180
Little Abraham. *See* Abraham.
Little Bear, Chief, ii, 34
  brief account of, i, 231
Little Beard, Chief, at Canandaigua council, vi, 326
  prisoner butchered by, vi, 311
Little Billy, Chief, annuity of, ii, 584
  present at conference, v, 667
Little Buffalo, a noted Pillager, v, 189

Little Chickasaw, De Soto encamped at, III, 46
Little Clam, chief of Red Lake band, II, 165
Little Cloud, Chief, mention of, VI, 469
Little Crow, Seven Fires defined by, II, 169
Little Crow's band, a Medawakanton band, III, 613
  listed as one of Seven Fires, II, 169
  See also Kah-po-sia.
Little Crow's village, census of, I, 498–507
Little Curly Head, chief of Gull Lake band, II, 165
Little Dekonie's band, census of, I, 498–507
Little Detroit, use of the name, III, 355
Little Doctor of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Little Flathead Indians, population of, VI, 701
Little Hill, chief, drawing made by, II, 224
Little Miami, earthworks of, explained, IV, 127
Little Mills band, census of, I, 498–507
Little Orphan, story of, I, 329
Little Osage, VI, 540
  annuities of, II, 585
  Osage band, III, 594
  See also Great and Little Osage.
Little Pine, Chief, brief account of, IV, 557
Little Prairie Indians, identification of, I, 307
  garden beds attributed to, I, 59
  See also Mascoutens.
Little Rapids band, listed as one of Seven Fires, II, 169
Little Six's band, a Medawakanton band, III, 613
  census, I, 498–507
  one of Seven Fires, II, 169
Littleson, Gov. H. W., III, 294
Little Tallassie, V, 254
  Creek town, V, 262
  French fort at, V, 278
  location, V, 257
  map of, V, 255
Little Thunder's band, census of, I, 498–507
Littleton, Gov., treaty concluded by, VI, 238
Little Turtle, Chief, Indian force led by, VI, 217
  treaty signed by, VI, 344
  victories of, V, 528
Liver disorders, treatment for, IV, 512
Liver-eaters. *See* Teu-a-wish.
Lligunos, a synonym of Dieguenos, II, 100
Lloyd, Edward, signer of Indian treaty, VI, 144
Lock(e), Dr. John, cited on age of mound, VI, 600
  earthworks discovered by, IV, 130
  Ohio ruins described by, V, 660–662
  reference to discovery by, IV, 174; V, 61, 114
Lodges, Bonak, construction of, IV, 223
  California, construction of, III, 218
  Chippewa, illustration of, V, 394
  Dacotah, description, IV, 67
  destruction, after a death, VI, 623
  Iroquois, construction of, IV, 662
  materials used for, IV, 56–57
  menstrual, description, V, 70
  Navajo, description, III, 70; IV, 213
  of Klamath River tribes, III, 140
  oracular, description, V, 421
    illustrated, V, 428
  order in, III, 236
  Oregon, construction of, III, 218
  Osage, construction of, IV, 304
  social life, III, 237, 239
  summer, of Winnebago, IV, 56–57
  vapor-bath, description, V, 424
  See also Wigwam.
Logan, Chief, III, 22, 198; V, 121; VI, 237, 265, 266, 647
  anecdotes concerning, IV, 619, 620
  appearance and character, IV, 619, 621, 622
  biography, IV, 614–627
  birthplace, VI, 264
  death, IV, 627
  emulated by Red Jacket, V, 669
  facts connected with speech of, III, 56
  Indian name of, IV, 616
  leader of the Mingoes, VI, 266
  murder of family of, IV, 623–624, 627–629, 630, 631; VI, 264–265

Logan, Chief—Continued
  oratory of, iii, 340; iv, 627; v, 410, 518
  origin of name, iv, 616
  son of Shikelimo, vi, 264
  speech, iv, 615
  stature, iv, 349
  tribe of, discussed, iv, 616
  war made by, on Whites, iv, 624
Logan, James, iv, 338, 339
Log house, adopted by Cherokees, iv, 662
Logstown, council held at, vi, 213–214
  Mingo chief at, vi, 213, 214
Loin-cloth or azian, iii, 65
  described and illustrated, iii, 68
Lokulk, population of, iii, 609
London Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, v, 122; vi, 516
Long, Lieutenant, sketch by, of wigwam, iii, 70
Long, Maj. S. H., mention of expedition of, vi, 519
  route of expedition of, i, 143
Long, R., copper implements discovered by, v, 665–666
Long Canes settlement, Indian attack on, vi, 239
Long House, a name for the Five Nations, v, 636, 645
Long Island, classification of language of, iii, 401
  Indian belief concerning, v, 38
Long Island tribes, generic name of, vi, 147
Long Knives, Pillager name for Americans, v, 188
"Long River," attempts to locate, i, 136–137
Loo Choos (Lou-choos), also called Quarrelers, ii, 27
  excepted from Athapascan group, v, 172
  reference to dialect of, ii, 27
  See also Loucheux.
Looking glass, Indian, illustrated, iii, 65
Loom, small, illustration of, ii, 516
    use of, ii, 515
  See also Weaving.
Lopez, Diego, discovery by, iv, 562
Loquamish, population of, v, 491
  position, v, 491
Lord's Prayer, French version of, v, 591
  in Anglo-Saxon, v, 590
  in Chippewa language, v, 592
  in Choctaw language, v, 592
  in Dacotah or Sioux language, v, 592
  in Mahican language, v, 591
  in Massachusetts Indian language, v, 591
  in Milicete language, v, 592
  Luther version of, v, 590
Los Punoois, iv, 564
Los Ranchos pueblo, changes in, v, 689
Lost tribes of Israel, theory regarding, ii, 136, 357
  See also Hebrew origin of Indians; Jewish customs.
Los Vasqueros, province of, iv, 40
Lotchnoay band, skirmishes with, vi, 359–360
Loucheux, classification of, iii, 401
  language, ii, 27; iii, 542
  See also Loo Choos.
Loudoun, vi, 233
Loughridge, R. M., iii, 384
  antiquities described by, v, 660
  work of, iv, 546
Louis, Colonel, aid rendered by, to colonists, vi, 280
Louisburg, fall of, vi, 234
Louisiana, admission to the Union, vi, 393
  Indian population of, iii, 585, 586; v, 480, 481
  population and area of, iv, 610
  settlement of, v, 108; vi, 185
Louisiana mission, work of, vi, 735
Louisiana Purchase, importance of, i, 181
Loup River, tribe on, vi, 547
Loups, synonym of Delawares (q. v.), v, 41, 136
Love, Slone, Chickasaw division of, i, 508
Love songs, Chippewa, v. 559–562
  symbols used for, i, 403–404
Lower Creeks. *See* Creeks, Lower
Lower towns, Creek. *See* Creek towns, Lower.

Lowrie, Walter, acknowledgment to, III, 376
  manuscript transmitted by, IV, 550
  Muscogee metal plates describes by, III, 89
  work of, III, 256, 259
Lowry, Rev. D., aborigines discussed by, III, 471–480
  paper by, on condition of Indians, II, 526–537
Lowry, David, report on Winnebago, III, 281, 282
Lowry, Miss Elizabeth, vocabulary by, II, 214
Lowry, S. B., information furnished by, III, 284
Lowry, Walter, IV, 535
Loyola, V, 88; VI, 72
  Spanish policy upheld by, III, 23
Lucas, Gov., III, 281
Lu chi paga, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Luckawis, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
Luckkarso, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571, 609
Lucktons, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
Lugh se le, census of, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Lu lan na, census of, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Lulbegrud, a Shawnee town, I, 301
Lummi, location, V, 704; VI, 703
  population, V, 704; VI, 703
  See also Hooklubmic; Nooklummi; Nookluolamic; Noothum.
Lummi River, Indians on, VI, 703
Lund, Dr., discoveries, in Brazil, II, 319
Lu-pa-yu-ma, use of name, III, 110
Luther, Martin, V, 88
Lutuamian family. *See* Luturim.
Luturim, a linguistic family, III, 402
Lycoming Creek, Indian name for, IV, 328
Lykins, Dr., I, 159
Lykins, Johnson (Johnston), translations by, IV, 539, 541
Lyman, VI, 169
Lynx, The. *See* Peshkewah.
Lyon, J. L., quoted on beard of the Indian, III, 377
Lyons, Capt., III, 109

M

Macapacelite, Chief, II, 259
  See also Mackatepelicit.
M'Arthur, Gen., VI, 364
Ma-caw (Makaw) Indians, VI, 687
  account of, IV, 600, 602; V, 700
  location, IV, 598
  population, I, 521; IV, 598; VI, 687, 701
  See also Makah.
McBride, James, V, 666
M'Call, Dr., burials described by, II, 318
  skeleton obtained from, II, 318
M'Clellan, Capt., V, 664; VI, 612, 613
M'Clure, missionary, meeting with Logan, IV, 621
McClure family, burial place of, V, 673
Maccoa, VI, 74
Macconce, or Little Bear, signature of, II, 226
M'Connell, Mr., charges made against, VI, 475
M'Coy, Isaac, I, 57
M'Crea, Miss Jane, reference to fate of, VI, 284
M'Dermit, Charles, III, 161, 167
  explorations of, III, 155
M'Donald, expedition led by, VI, 307
McDonald, James, letter by, II, 304–306
M'Donald, Walter, III, 173
McDougal, Lt., VI, 245
M'Dougal, Mr., II, 305
  escape from Indians, II, 289
  held as hostage, II, 258–264
M'Dowell, Col., VI, 375
Mace, description, I, 78, 92–93
  illustration of, I, 77
  use, I, 92–93
  See also War club.
M'Gillivray, Alexander, Caleb Swan's journey with, V, 251–252
  Creeks reorganized by, V, 281
  peace delegation headed by, VI, 332, 365
  reference to marriage of, VI, 345, 351
  winter home of, V, 252
McGilvery, William, a Creek chief, IV, 576

Machecous, iii, 559
  estimate of warriors of, iii, 557, 559
  See also Creeks; Muskogees.
M'Intosh, Gen., expedition of, vi, 301
McIntosh, Rolly (Roly), vi, 533
  chief of the Muscogees, i, 267; vi, 533
  Creek emigrants led by, vi, 479
M'Intosh, trader, reference to marriage of, vi, 345, 351
M'Intosh, Gen. William, vi, 376
  death penalty paid by, v, 577; vi, 417
  treaty signed by, vi, 417
Mackanotin, census of, v, 493
Mackatepelicit, second chief of Ottawas, ii, 248, 251
  See also Macapacelite.
M'Kee, Col., iii, 161, 167, 170, 173, 176; v, 101
M'Kee, John, iii, 173
M'Kee, Redick, data on population by, iii, 634; v, 484; vi, 705, 711
  journal of expedition of, iii, 99–177
M'Kenney, Thomas L., appointment of, to head Indian Bureau, vi, 404
  letter from, to Secretary of War, iii, 580–582
  statement submitted by, iii, 583–586
McKenney, Thomson, iv, 583
Mackenzie, Sir Alexander, ceremonies described by, vi, 627
  quoted on Chepeweyans, i, 19
  quoted on fire ceremonies, v, 65–66
M'Kenzie, Kenneth, vocabularies furnished by, iii, 398
Mackinaw Island, Indian name of, ii, 139
M'Kinney, Dr., iii, 161
M'Kinney, Rev. E., acknowledgment to, iii, 376
Mackintosh, Mr., narration of, concerning the Mandans, iii, 253
McLain (McLean), Nathaniel, acknowledgment to, iii, 375
  vocabulary transmitted by, ii, 206
McLaughlin, Dr., v, 664
M'Loughridge, Rev. R. L., acknowledgment to, iii, 376
M'Murray, Mrs. Charlotte, vi, 566
M'Nab, Andrew, western New York described by, i, 163–165
Macomb, Gen., vi, 398
Mad Blue of Tuck a batch cha Town, iv, 575
Mad Dog, Chief, at battle at Attasee, vi, 368
  chief of Tuckabatchees, v, 254, 263
Mad River, brief description of, iii, 133
Mad River Indians, vocabulary obtained from, iii, 133
Madahas, included with Caddoes, vi, 686
  See also Anadarko.
Madä-win-inee, curing art of, ii, 224
Madison, Dr., murdered by Ke-taw-kah, iii, 279
Madison, James, Indian activities under, vi, 353–376
  remarks by, on Canadian posts, iii, 333
  vocabulary from papers of, iii, 424
Madoc, Prince, v, 60; vi, 182
  colony led by, vi, 742
  discussion of story of, v, 34
  reference to tradition of, i, 124
  voyage of, reference to, iv, 81, 118
Madodiswon, ceremony of, v, 425–426
  use of, v, 424, 426
Magic, discussion of, iv, 489–497; v, 415–441
  practice by secret societies, v, 71
  use in hunting, ii, 51; v, 397
  See also Medical practices; Sorcery; Witchcraft.
Magic Circle, story of, i, 327
Magician, office of, discussed, i, 358–359
  See also Juggler; Medicine man.
Magnusen, Prof., i, 107
  inscription interpreted by, iv, 119
Magoffin, James, information obtained from, iv, 628
  letter from, regarding Col. Richard Sparks, iv, 629–632
  reference to letter of, iv, 628
Magui villages. *See* Moqui.
Mahaha, a village of the Ahahways, iii, 250
Mah-ha-os, a division of the Yuma, ii, 116
  See also Mohave.
Mahican language, data respecting principles of, v, 618–620
  Lord's Prayer in, v, 591

Mahicans (Mahikanders), IV, 332
  affiliations, IV, 617
  government, V, 504
  identification, V, 506
  missionary work among, V, 503, 506
  place of refuge, V, 519–520
  population, V, 504
  subjection to Iroquois, IV, 617
  See also Aquatzagane; Mohicans; Orunges.
Mahigan, Pontiac's plans betrayed by, II, 249
Mahikanders. *See* Mahicans.
Mahomedanism, date in Hindoostan, V, 58
Mahomet, story of, compared with Wyandot tale, III, 322
Main White River, Indian population of, V, 491
Maine, Indian lands in, III, 586; V, 480
  Indian population, III, 583, 586; V, 480
  Indians occupying coast of, VI, 744
  northern, Indians of, V, 218
  population and area of, IV, 610
Maize. *See* Corn.
Makahs, location, V, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 703; VI, 703
  See also Clossets; Ma-caw; Quinnechart.
Makaw. *See* Ma-caw; Makah.
Mal Anton, Indian guide, II, 111
Malayan race, civilization of, IV, 357
  heads of, described, IV, 357
  territory occupied by, IV, 357
Malecite. *See* Amalecites; Etchemins; Melecites.
Malecite language. *See* Milicete language.
Malte-Brun, races classified by, IV, 355
Mamalelekala. *See* Mar ma li la calla.
Mammatsican, Mohickanders represented by, at council, VI, 132
Ma-mong-e-se-da, Chief, ally of the French, II, 150
  at the fall of Quebec, II, 148
Mamongizida, chief at Chegoimiegon, V, 525
  friend of the French, V, 525
Manabosho (Manabozho, Menabozhoo), Algonquin conception of, VI, 659
  Algonquin mythological hero, I, 18; V, 63
Manabosho—Continued
  heredity, V, 147
  mythological hero of the Chippewa, V, 147
  pictographic devices of, V, 150
  power of, I, 82; VI, 662
  tales of, I, 317–319; V, 149–150
  works of, V, 419
  See also Nenabozhoo.
Manahoac. *See* Mannahoacs.
Manatouline(s), meaning of name, VI, 202
  scheme for removal of Chippewas to, VI, 463
  tribe occupying, VI, 202
  war with inhabitants of, VI, 203
Ma naw way, a Creek chief, IV, 576
Manchester, Indian village at, V, 225
Manco Capac, the Ghebir, I, 13; V, 105
  account of, V, 94
  supposed origin of, IV, 123
Mandan language, II, 239; III, 252
  classification, III, 252, 255
  conclusions concerning, III, 406
  distinct from others, III, 595, 630
  peculiarities, III, 255
  vocabulary, III, 255–256, 446–459
Mandans (Mandons), V, 180, 494; VI, 687
  analogous to Upsarokas, III, 514
  and Upsarokas, description of, III, 247–256
  census, VI, 556
  classification, III, 402
  color, II, 321
  comparative intellectual development, III, 250
  cranial capacity, III, 250
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  effect of smallpox on, II, 239; III, 254; VI, 486
  enemies, III, 248
  eyes, II, 321
  habitations, VI, 695
  hair, II, 321, 322
  history, III, 253–254
  in the Dacota group, II, 37
  location, III, 595; V, 494; VI, 556, 705
    map showing, III, 96
  ordeals endured by, V, 59–60
  origin and affiliations, III, 247–256
  origin tradition, III, 247–248
  permanent village, III, 630
  physical characteristics, III, 250, 254

Mandans—Continued
  population, I, 257, 523; II, 239; III, 249–250, 253, 254, 595, 609, 630, 631; V, 494; VI, 687, 695, 696, 705
  reference to territory, IV, 486
  religion, III, 248
  shape of skulls, II, 317
  theory of origin, V, 60
  villages, III, 248–249, 250, 253
  visited by Lewis and Clarke, III, 249
  warfare, III, 253
Mandioca root, press used for, IV, 445
    illustrated, IV, 456
  use as food, IV, 445–446
Mandons. *See* Mandans.
Manecis, III, 558
Maneto. *See* Manito.
Manhattan Island, derivation and meaning of name, IV, 379; V, 593; VI, 101
  Hudson repulsed at, II, 23
  tribe occupying, VI, 100
Manhattans (Manhattanese), brief account of, VI, 100–101
  derivation of name, V, 38
  hostility to Hendrik Hudson, II, 23
  origin, VI, 116
  state of culture, V, 107
  territory occupied by, VI, 32, 147
Manido. *See* Manito.
Manistee River, census of Indians of, I, 458–467
Manito(s) (Maneto, Manido, Manitoe, Monedo, Moneto), I, 34–35
  Algonquin Creator, IV, 664; V, 143, 402
  beliefs concerning, V, 402–404; VI, 629–630
  benevolent spirit, IV, 637
  boulders representing, I, 94
  ceremony of invocation to, V, 435–437
  explanation of the term, IV, 621; V, 71, 416–417; VI, 658
  feast given to, V, 426
  illustration of, I, 129
  nature of, V, 75
  selection for totems, V, 74
Manitoosh, evil spirit of Algonquins, VI, 630
Mankind, classification of races of, IV, 355–357
  discussion of unity of, IV, 358–359, 364–365; V, 288–289
  racial variations, IV, 360–365
Manlius stone, I, 109; V, 85
  illustration of, V, 85; VI, 611
Mannahoacs, V, 122
Manners and customs, III, 53–70; V, 49–82; VI, 442, 614–635
  as an indication of origin, V, 57–70, 81–82
  ceremonial, attitude toward, VI, 212
  changes in, VI, 618–625
  evidence of unity in, IV, 172
  general similarity in, V, 56
  Indian, compared with Biblical, III, 243–244
    compared with Hebrew, I, 38, 261; V, 86
    compared with Hindoo, V, 57–60, 217
    compared with Oriental, V, 415
  influences affecting, V, 80; VI, 615, 672–673
  of Apaches, V, 210–212
  of Bonaks or Root-Diggers, IV, 221
  of California tribes, V, 214–217, 649–650
  of Creeks, V, 264–274
  of Dacotahs, III, 233–246; IV, 59–72
  of Moquis, IV, 72–91
  of Navajos, IV, 72–91, 213–214, 217–218
  of New England tribes, VI, 109–110
  of Oregon tribes, V, 651–657
  of Texas Indians, V, 682–685
  of Winnebagos, IV, 51–59
  See also Customs; Etiquette; Family life; Greetings; Hospitality; and also under tribal names.
Mante, Maj., VI, 272
  quoted on Indian character, VI, 239
Manteo, VI, 84, 85, 182, 186
  made Lord of Roanoke, VI, 93
  service as interpreter, VI, 89, 90, 91
Manzana, population of, I, 519
Maple River band, census of, I, 478–487
Maple sugar, made by Winnebagoes, IV, 58

Maps, ethnographical, of Indian tribes, in 1600, II, 28
  ideographic, by Botturini, I, 20
  made by an Ioway brave, III, 256–257
  of country of the Iowas, III, 256
  of Creek country, V, 253
  of Cunningham's Island, II, 84
  of earthworks, Cunningham's Island, II, 84
  of Georgia, with part of Florida, Louisiana, and Carolina, in 1764, V, 253
  of Oregon, showing location of tribes, III, 200
  of route of Coronado's expedition, IV, 39
  of route of De Soto, III, 50
  of sources of the Mississippi, VI, 451
  of Teton fortifications, V, 100
  of the Indian colonies west of Missouri and Arkansas, 1853, IV, 180; VI, 519
  of the southwestern part of New Mexico, IV, 24
  on bark, drawn by Indians, V, 184
  showing boundaries of the Ojibwa, Menomonee, Winnebago, and Dacotah tribes, 1851, II, 137
  showing Iowa migrations, III, 256–257
  showing location of linguistic stocks, II, 28
  showing location of tribes, II, 28, 137; III, 96, 200; IV, 24, 39, 180
Maquas, enemies of Pennacooks, V, 231
  See also Mohawks.
Maquelnoten, location and population of, VI, 702
Marbery, Col. L., V, 253
Marchisseaux, M., trading voyage of, III, 353
Marcoz de Niza, explorations of, IV, 22–23, 24
Marcy, Capt. R. B., IV, 40
  vocabularies collected by, V, 709
Mareachette, a synonym of Milicite, V, 675
Marest, V, 184; VI, 734
  death of, V, 524
Maricopas (Coco Maricopas), relations with Pimos, III, 296
  sold into slavery by Yumas, II, 115
  Yuma expedition against, II, 113–114
Marietta, Ohio, earthworks at, IV, 131; VI, 597, 603
  founding of, VI, 597
  opening of tumulus at, IV, 131–132
Mariposa County, Indian population of, IV, 608
Mariposa Indians, VI, 687
  population of, V, 484; VI, 687
Marlain or Kite Indians, country occupied by, III, 596
  population, III, 596, 609
Marlborough, burned by Indians, VI, 164
Mar ma li la calla, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census, V, 488
Marquesas Islands, canoes of, I, 24
  characteristics of natives of, IV, 361–362
Marquette [Jacques, Père], V, 108, 184; VI, 734
  burial and reburial of, VI, 257
  contact with Ojibwas, II, 147
  explorations of, IV, 199
  See also Marquette, James; Marquette, Joseph; Marquette, Pierre.
Marquette, James, missionary work of, V, 648
Marquette, Joseph, death of, V, 648
  explorations of, V, 648
Marquette, Pierre, explorations of, I, 135
Marriage. *See* Marriage customs; Intermarriage.
Marriage customs, Apache, V, 210
  California Indians, IV, 223–224
  Chippewyan, V, 176
  Clear Lake Indians, III, 112
  Comanche, I, 235–236; II, 131–132; V, 683
  Creek, V, 268–269, 272–273
  Dacotah, III, 237–238, 240
  general, II, 48–49, 63; III, 480
  Iowa Indians, VI, 549
  Iroquois (Five Nations), III, 191
  Kenistenos, V, 166–167
  Klamath River Indians, III, 175
  Moquis, IV, 86–87
  Navajo, IV, 214

- Marriage customs—Continued
  - Northern California and Oregon, iii, 211, 212
  - Oregon Indians, v, 654
  - Pueblo, iv, 76
  - Texas tribes, v, 683
  - Wee-yot, iii, 127
  - *See also* Courtship; Divorce; Family life; Infidelity; Labor; Polygamy; Widowers; Widows; Wife-lending; Women.
- Marsh, Thomas, signer of Indian treaty, vi, 144
- Marshall, Benjamin, Creek chief, of Irish descent, i, 267
  - information obtained from, iii, 404
- Marshall, Col. J. F., iv, 160
- Marshall, Joseph, a Coweta Town chief, iv, 579
- Marshpee, i, 287
- Marshpee Indians, iii, 583
  - location and population of, iii, 583
- Martaw way hadjo, a Creek chief, iv, 576
- Martell, leader of delegation to Washington, i, 415
- Martha's Vineyard, discovery of, vi, 95–96
  - missionary work among Indians of, vi, 734, 736–737
  - naming of, vi, 103–104
- Martha's Vineyard Indians, location and population of, iii, 583
- Martin, Henry, disappearance of, iv, 593
- Martin, J., letter of, iv, 627–629
  - letter to, iv, 629–632
- Martin, Joseph, treaty concluded by, vi, 327
- Martin, Hon. Luther, iv, 629, 632
- Martin, Thomas S., deposition made before, iv, 581
- Marvin, R. P., petition signed by, iii, 618
- Maryland, cave in, described, iii, 338
  - colonization of, vi, 744
  - German settlements in, iii, 338
  - population and area of, iv, 610
  - religious freedom of, vi, 129
  - tribes of, vi, 32, 128–145
- Maryland tribes, hostilities among, vi, 143
- Masawomacks. *See* Massawomacks.
- Mascotins. *See* Mascoutens.
- Mascoudins. *See* Mascoutens.
- Mascoutens (Mascotins, Mascoudins, Mascoutins, Maskoutens, Miscotins), i, 305–308; iii, 277, 278; vi, 35
  - affiliates, iv, 245
  - Algonquin tribe, v, 40
  - alliance with Bone Indians, vi, 203
  - defeated by Ottowas and Pottawatomies, iv, 245
  - disappearance, iv, 245; v, 191
  - expulsion from Lake region, i, 305; vi, 206
  - historical notes on, iv, 244–245
  - locality occupied by, i, 53; iii, 559; iv, 244; vi, 204, 206, 714
  - name, derivation, vi, 203
    - meaning, iv, 244; v, 40
    - synonyms, iv, 206, 244, 245; v, 41
  - ossuaries attributed to, i, 69
  - population, iv, 245; vi, 204, 272, 714
  - possible absorption of, vi, 204
  - warriors, estimate of, iii, 554, 559; vi, 271
  - *See also* Muscodanig; Mushkodains; Musketoons; Musquitans.
- Mascoutins. *See* Mascoutens.
- Ma-se-wa-pe-ga, story of dream of, ii, 144
- Mashpee. *See* Marshpee.
- Maskegon. *See* Maskigos; Mushkeags; Muskegos.
- Maskigos (Maskigoes), an Algonquin division, v, 40
  - French relations with, vi, 237
  - included in Algonquin group, ii, 36, 341
  - meaning of name, v, 40
  - *See also* Mushkeags; Muskegos.
- Maskoutens. *See* Mascoutens.
- Masks, obsidian, illustrations of, vi, 587, 588
  - use in Moqui dance, iv, 84–85
- Mason, punitive expedition led by, vi, 135
- Mason, Col., mention of, vi, 145
- Mason, John, Pequot War conducted by, vi, 117
- Mason, Col. R. B., observations of, i, 154
- Masonic fraternity, comparison with Medicine Society, iii, 286
- Massa or Natic language, brief vocabulary of, v, 556–557

Massaba, feast to, v, 436–437
Massachusetts, Indian lands in, v. 480
  Indian population of, III, 583, 586; v, 480
  landing of emigrants in, VI, 744
  mentioned by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
  population and area of, IV, 610
  settlement of, VI, 103–104
Massachusetts Indians, derivation of name, v, 38
  described by Cotton Mather, I, 284–286
  migration legend, v, 98
  mixed with African race, I, 524
  population, I, 287, 524
  settlements, I, 287
Massachusetts language, application of term, I, 287
  Bible translated into, I, 287
  classification, III, 401; v, 145–146
  grammatical notes on, I, 295, 296, 297, 298–299
  Lord's Prayer in, v, 591
  vocabulary of, I, 288–299
  See also Natic language.
Massasauga. *See* Missisaugies.
Massasoit, brief description of, VI, 103, 114
  country ruled by, VI, 744
  meeting with Pilgrims, II, 25
  position and power of, VI, 151
  relations with the English, VI, 114–115
  sons of, VI, 151
  with Pilgrims, illustration showing, II, 26
Massawomacks (Masawomacks), v, 122
  name for the Five Nations, v, 36, 37
  name for the Iroquois (q. v.), VI, 130, 194
Masset. *See* Massetta.
Massetta, census of, v, 489
  language, v, 489
  location, v, 489
Massie, Gen., v, 662
Mastodon, belief concerning remains of, IV, 645; VI, 651
  bones of, on Arkansas River, I, 270
Masut Pomo. *See* Masu-ta-kaya.
Masu-ta-kaya (Masu-ta-kea), and others, population of, III, 634
  language, III, 112
  treaty made with, III, 112
Mather, Cotton, v, 51; VI, 106
  quoted on sun worship, v, 64
Mathers, Lt., IV, 630
Matilpe. *See* Murtilpar.
Matlock, G. C., population report by, VI, 696
Matrilineal descent. *See* Descent.
Mats, Shoshonee, I, 214
Mattahunt, mentioned by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Mattapoisett, Indian raid on, VI, 155
Mattaponies, brief account of, v, 36
Mattapony River, Indians of, v, 36
Mattasoons. *See* Wattasoons.
Matter, integrity of, I, 171
Mauherosqueck, listed by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Mauh-teeg, a Klamath River tribe, III, 634
Maumee. *See* Fort Maumee.
Maumes, called Omameeg, v, 39
  enemies of the Chippewas, v, 39
  See also Miamis.
Maupertius, M., work on languages, II, 355–356
Maury, Lt. M., cited on Indian origin, I, 22–26
Mauvila, battle at, III, 42–44, 90; VI, 61
  description, III, 42; IV, 124
Mavilians, a name for the Choctaws, II, 34
Maw-hee-koo-shay-naw-zhe-kaw, characterization of, IV, 233
Maw-keek-souch-kaw, brief account of, IV, 233
Maw-kuh-soonch-kaw's Band, census of, I, 498–507
Maxwell, Thomas, acknowledgment to, IV, 173
  letters of, v, 666–674
May, river of, name for the St. John's, VI, 73, 74
Mayer, Brantz, discussion by, of Logan massacre, III, 56
  paper by, on Mexican antiquities, VI, 577–594
  reference to collection of, IV, 174
  translation made by, III, 335

Mayhew, Experience, missionary work of, VI, 736
Mayhew, John, missionary work of, VI, 736
Mayhew, Thomas, Jr., missionary work of, VI, 736
Mayhew, Thomas, Sr., missionary work of, VI, 736
Mayhew, Zechariah, missionary work of, VI, 736
Mayhew family, missionary labors of, VI, 734, 735
Mazigabau, a noted Pillager, V, 189
Mde-wahantonwan. *See* Medawakantons.
Mdewakanton. *See* Medawakantons.
Mead, John, Jr., investigations of, I, 163
Meadow Indians, a name for the Mascoutins (q. v.), IV, 245
Measles, fatal treatment, IV, 512
  mortality from, IV, 593, 595
Meat, curing of, III, 218; IV, 57, 68
  See also Buffalo; Game.
Mecadacut, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Mechecaukis (Mechecouakis), country occupied by, III, 559
  warriors, estimate of, III, 554, 559
  See also Foxes.
Mechecouakis. *See* Mechecaukis.
Mechuacan Province, customs of, IV, 449
Meda, discussion of term, I, 358; V, 420–421; 445
  See also Medas.
Medals, described and illustrated, I, 79
  French, use of, V, 109
Medas (Medawes), admission to society of, I, 360
  among the Pillagers, V, 189
  curing methods, VI, 110
  functions, V, 405
  harm done by, IV, 637
  illustration showing gathering of, V, 72
  rank of, among medicine men, II, 223
  secret society of, V, 71
  See also Meda; Medawin.
Medawakantons (Mde-wahantonwan, Mendawacanton, Mendawahkanton, Mendawakantons, Mendewakantons), VI, 687
  called Dakotahs of the river, VI, 386
  decline of, II, 98
  division of the Sioux nation, II, 168, 169
  governed by Wabasha, VI, 386
  payments made to, VI, 721
  population, III, 613, 614
  seven bands of, III, 613
  statistics concerning, III, 612, 613–614
  subdivision of the Isanyati, I, 248
  treaty made by, VI, 421
  villages, II, 97
  See also O-man-ee; People of the Lakes.
Medawes. *See* Medas.
Me-da-we-win. *See* Medawin.
Medawin (Me-da-we-win, Midawin), art of medical magic, I, 358
  ceremony of, V, 428–441
  Chippewa ceremony of, V, 429–433
  healing ceremony of, I, 360
  importance, V, 434
  medicine feast of the Chippewa, V, 149
  rites of, II, 138
  Sioux ceremony of, V, 433–441
  See also Medawisos.
Medawin society, assemblage, in spring, II, 56
  degrees in, V, 632
  medical art of, V, 423
  object of, V, 420
Medawisos, illustration showing ceremony of, V, 428
Medewiwin. *See* Medawin.
Medford, attack on, by Indians, VI, 164
Medical knowledge, of ancient Asiatic nations, IV, 492–494
  of Indian tribes, IV, 501–519; V, 445–446
Medical practices, IV, 502–519; VI, 631–635
  Athapascan, V, 177
  beliefs connected with, IV, 497
  Chickasaw, I, 310
  Chinook, VI, 619–620
  Comanche, I, 233–234; II, 130

Medical practices—Continued
  Congaree, IV, 158
  cost of failure in, VI, 632
  Creek, V, 270–271
  Dakota, I, 250–255; IV, 649–651; VI, 655–657
  Klamath River Indians, III, 175
  Massachusetts Indians, I, 285
  Muscogee, I, 273–274
  Navajo, IV, 217
  Ojibwa, II, 138
  Sioux, II, 179–182
  sorcery in, IV, 492–494
  success of, IV, 242
  use of charms in, I, 86
  Winnebago, III, 497–498; IV, 241–243
  See also Disease; Medicinal plants; Medicine Dance; Medicine men; Obstetrics; Wounds.
Medical practitioners, discussion of classes of, V, 445–446
  office of, I, 359
  See also Medicine men.
Medicinal plants, abortion produced by, I, 252
  ceremonial inspection of, V, 424–425
  Indian knowledge of, V, 446
  list of, with uses, IV, 516–518
  properties, IV, 516–518
  purification, V, 424
  secrecy regarding, I, 251
  story of origin, I, 318
  use, I, 251–252, 274; IV, 641–642; VI, 632
    in obstetrics, IV, 515
Medicine, concocting of, illustrated, V, 446
  preservation of, IV, 519
  See also Medical practices; Medicinal plants; Medicine bags; Medicine Dance; Medicine men.
Medicine animal, of Winnebagoes, discussed, II, 223–224
  of Winnebagoes, illustrated, II, 224
Medicine bag (sack), ceremonial closing of, V, 433
  ceremonial inspection of, V, 424–425
  ceremonial use of, III, 287; V, 66
  contents, V, 66; VI, 660
  religious character, VI, 660
  value attached to, III, 288
Medicine Dance (feast), by both sexes, IV, 63
  chant used in, IV, 643–644
  for the repose of spirits, IV, 65
  improper use of term, V, 72
  secrecy concerning, III, 230–231
  story of introduction of, I, 318
  Winnebago, described, III, 286–288
    illustrated, III, 286
  traditional origin, V, 149
Medicine feast. *See* Medicine Dance.
Medicine-hunter, a Comanche chief, II, 128
Medicine lodge, compared with Jewish tabernacle, I, 261
Medicine-man (men), activities of, IV, 495
  and patient, illustration showing, VI, 173
  as doctors, IV, 649–650
  as priests, VI, 654
  ceremony of consultation with, V, 425
  Chippewa, skill of, IV, 242
  classes, V, 71; VI, 648
  Dakota names for, IV, 642
  dress, description of, V, 440
  fear of, IV, 650
  instruction of, VI, 634
  of the Dakotahs, VI, 648–657
  order of, among the Winnebagoes, II, 223–224
  Oregon Indian, customs concerning, V, 652–654
  origin of power, IV, 646; VI, 652
  part taken by, in Indian dance, III, 287
  payment of, IV, 241
  popular fallacy concerning, IV, 641
  power and influence, III, 288; IV, 641–651; VI, 647
  priestly functions, IV, 648
  rank, VI, 633
  reincarnation, IV, 646
  supposed power, V, 652
  training and initiation, V, 652–653
  treatment of the sick, I, 250; VI, 619–620
  use of power, IV, 646–648; VI, 652–653
  use of the term, IV, 641–642; VI, 648
  visits to the sick, V, 437–441

Medicine-man—Continued
  war offices, IV, 648–649
  See also Physician; Priest; Prophet.
Medicine Society, compared with Masonic order, III, 286
  initiation into, III, 286–288; V, 426–433
Medilding. *See* Ollep-pauh'l-kah-teht'l.
Medill, W., letter from, to Jacob Thompson, III, 619–620
  letter to, from Albert Gallatin, III, 397–400
Meeker, Jotham, translations by, IV, 538
  work of, IV, 538, 539, 541
Meherrics, Meherries. *See* Meherrins.
Meherrins (Meherrics, Meherries), allotted lands with Cayugas, III, 292
  country occupied by, III, 196
  included in Monacan dialects, III, 292
  received into Iroquois Confederacy, III, 292
  synonymous with Tutelo, V, 36, 37
Meh-teh, a Klamath River tribe and village, III, 138, 634
Meigs, Prof. C., III, 384
Meigs, Josiah, estimates made by, II, 592, 593–595
  statement furnished by, II, 591
Mekinak, Chief, II, 271
Meldonado, Don Rodrigo, explorations of, IV, 36
Melecites (Milicetes, Milicites), country occupied by, V, 38, 219, 674
  disputes over land of, V, 675–676
  history, V, 674–676
  language, V, 674
  See also Amalecites; Etchemins.
Melendez, Ribault captured by, VI, 744
Melleray, Vice-Admiral, VI, 55
Meloche, Baptiste, II, 253
Memnon, invention of letters by, V, 88
Memory, pictographs as aid to, I, 404–405
  See also Mnemonic devices.
Men, Indian, activities of, II, 50
  character of, in domestic life, II, 64
  See also Family life; Labor; Warriors; Widowers.
Menabozhoo. *See* Manabosho.
Menard, member of expedition, III, 353
Menard, Col. Pierre, II, 308; IV, 260
Menatonon, chief of the Chowanocks, VI, 90, 91
Mendawacanton, Mendawahkanton, Mendawakantons, Mendewakantons. *See* Medawakan tons.
Mendocino Reservation, report on, VI, 715, 717
Mendoza, activities, in Mexico, IV, 22, 23; VI, 69
Menduwakanton and Wapakotah Sioux, population of, VI, 707
Menendez, arrival at Fort Caroline, VI, 76
Mengwe, a synonym of Mingo, VI, 138
Menomeenees, Menomenes, Menomenies. *See* Menomonees.
Menominee. *See* Folle Avoins; Menomonees; Mynomanies.
Menominee language. *See* Menomonee language.
Menomonee language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341, 358
  vocabulary of, II, 470–481
Menomonees (Menomeenees, Menomenes, Menomenies, Menomonies, Mineamies, Monomonees, Monomonies), III, 277, VI, 375, 488, 687
  associates of the Sauks, VI, 276
  brief account of, III, 560; VI, 691
  census, I, 488–497; III, 621–628; VI, 691
  classification, III, 401
  country occupied by, I, 488; III, 584, 591; VI, 206, 275, 385, 705
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  establishment on reservation, V, 463–464, 470
  fiscal statistics relating to, V, 721, 722, 723
  funds required for, II, 566, 569–570
  hunting ground, VI, 276
  investments for, II, 562
  land assigned to, IV, 463
    ceded by, II, 603
    claimed by, III, 584
    purchased from, II, 600, 601
    statistics on, II, 605
  language spoken by, III, 562
  leading men of, III, 568
  linguistic affiliations, I, 302
  listed by Little Crow as one of Seven Fires, II, 169
  map showing location, II, 137; III, 96

Menomonees—Continued
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 735, 737
  name, origin and meaning of, V, 40, 145
    synonyms, III, 562
  not an independent tribe, V, 40
  number of Catholics among, V, 699
  number of villages of, III, 560, 562; VI, 271
  picture writing among, I, 338
  population, I, 523; III, 562, 584, 591, 610; V, 708; VI, 271, 275, 687, 705, 707
  relations with other tribes, III, 566
  removal, plans for, IV, 486
    postponed, II, 550
  settlement of Stockbridges among, VI, 504
  trade of, III, 564
  trading post for, III, 566
  tradition concerning, I, 302–304
  treaties with, V, 499; VI, 421
  treaty settling boundary for, VI, 422
  warriors, number of, III, 560, 562; VI, 271
  See also Folle Avoins; Mynomanies.
Menomonies. *See* Menomonees.
Menstrual customs, V, 70
  of Blackfeet, V, 183
  of Callapooyas, V, 664
  of Chippewyans, V, 176
  of Dacotahs, III, 227, 235, 243
  similar to Hebraic, III, 62
  theory of origin, V, 60, 70
  tribes observing, V, 60
Menstrual lodge, description, V, 70
  illustration of, V, 70
Mental capacity. *See* Intellectual capacity.
Mental characteristics, Indian, discussion of, I, 29–43; III, 54–59, 246; V, 32–33
  permanence of, I, 15, 41, 412
  poetic development of the Indian mind, III, 326–328
  shown in pictographs, V, 64
  similarity among tribes, V, 31–32, 56
Mentality. *See* Intellectual capacity.
Mercede (Merceda) Indians, VI, 687
  population, IV, 608; V, 484; VI, 687
Meredith, W. M., acknowledgment to, III, 375
Merrill, Moses, work of, IV, 550
Merrimack, a synonym of Pennacook, VI, 173
Merrimack River, Amoskeags living on, V, 221
  Indian fisheries on, V, 225
Merrimack tribes, location of seat of, VI, 174
Merrimac(k) Valley, description, V, 219–220
  Indians of, V, 217, 218, 221, 222, 223; VI, 173
  land in, granted to Passaconnaway, V, 236
Merrit, O. H., information furnished by, VI, 709
Meruelo, Diego, II, 35
Mescal plant, use by Mexicans and Apaches, V, 208
Mescaleros (Muscalaroes, Muscaleros, Mus-ka-le-ras), VI, 687
  and Euquatops, population of, VI, 708
  Apache band, V, 203, 689
  dialect of, V, 203
  location, I, 239; VI, 705, 708
  population, I, 239, 518; VI, 687, 705
  See also Apaches Mascaleros; Euquatops.
Meshekunnoghquoh, treaty signed by, VI, 344
Mesnard, Réné, martyrdom of, V, 647
Mesquite beans. *See* Mizquite bean.
Messesagues. *See* Missisaugies.
Meta. *See* Meh-teh.
Metacom. *See* Pometacom.
Metahartas, III, 251
  See also Hidatsa.
Metalliferous diluvial deposits, location of, I, 152
Metallurgy, aboriginal periods indicated by, IV, 139
  among Peruvian and Mexican tribes, V, 106
  attempts at, I, 71
  Indian knowledge of, IV, 164–165
  See also Metals; Mining.
Metals, furnace for fusing, IV, 447–448
  use by aborigines, III, 75–76, 87–90
  See also Metallurgy; Mining.

Metamorphosis, lack of belief in, III, 231

Metawa, treaty discussed by, VI, 395

Metchigamias. *See* Michigamies.

Metea, speech made by, VI, 394
  treaty discussed by, VI, 395

Metempsychosis. *See* Transmigration of souls.

Methodist Episcopal Church, missions established by, VI, 738–739

Methodist Episcopal Mission Board, schools controlled by, V, 694

Methodist Episcopal Missionary Society, work of, V, 502, 503

Methodist missions, work of, V, 700

Metoacs, a Long Island tribe, VI, 100
  derivation of name of, V, 38
  generic name of Long Island tribes, VI, 147
  origin, VI, 116
  totemic type, VI, 100

Metoxon, a Mohican chief, VI, 277

Mexican Antiquities. *See* Antiquities, Mexican.

Mexican boundary, settlement of, II, 117–118

Mexican chronology, ancient, V, 96–97

Mexican civilization, influences affecting, V, 291–292

Mexican kings, duration of reigns of, V, 97
  list of, V, 97

Mexican tribes, ancestry of, III, 303
  chief deity of, VI, 638
  classed as Toltecan, II, 329
  connection, with United States tribes, IV, 170
  cranial measurements, II, 330
  development, V, 392
  extent of influence, V, 107
  Mississippi Valley accessible to, V, 95
  reference to migration of, III, 300, 304
  See also Aztecs; Toltecs.

Mexico, antiquities of, VI, 604–605
  art of, as prototype for northern tribes, V, 391
  civilization, IV, 115, 122; V, 29
  date of final fall, III, 27
  destruction of records, V, 102
  early tribes, VI, 596
  gods and goddesses, VI, 637–645

Mexico—Continued
  invasion, II, 20
  kings, VI, 742
  periods in history, III, 515
  reference to early government, III, 181, 182, 183
  thread making in, IV, 442–443
  weaving in, V, 106

Mexico City, antiquities of, VI, 582
  founding of, VI, 596, 742

Mexico, Valley of, migrations into, V, 95–96

Mé-yemma, a Trinity River village, III, 139

Meyers, Mr., mention of, III, 355

Miami, English defeated at, II, 286

Miami Indians. *See* Miamis.

Miami language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341
  vocabulary of, II, 470–481

Miami of the Lakes River, Indian communication by, VI, 334

Miami River, Indians of, VI, 275, 714

Miami Valley, Great, copper implements discovered in, V, 665

Miamis (Miamies), III, 555; V, 495, 647; VI, 329, 488, 687
  agency used by, VI, 397
  and others, population of (1812), V, 708
  annuities of, II, 587, 589
  armistice granted to, VI, 364
  brief account of, III, 561; VI, 334
  census, I, 488–497; III, 621–628
  classification, III, 401; V, 145
  cranial capacity, II, 335; V, 244
  defeat by Gen. Wayne, VI, 217
  divisions, III, 404
  Eel River, payments to, VI, 721
  facial angle, II, 335
  friendly to French, VI, 237
  funds required for, II, 569
  general condition, IV, 467, 468
  hostility, VI, 334
  in Pontiac's conspiracy, II, 307; VI, 243
  included in Algonquin group, II, 36
  Indiana, payments to, VI, 721
  intemperance among, I, 435
  Iroquois name for, VI, 271

Miamis—Continued
  - lands, IV, 572
    - ceded by, II, 603; VI, 499
    - claimed by, III, 584
    - purchased from, II, 593, 595, 598, 599, 601
    - sale of, V, 528
    - statistics on, II, 605
  - location, I, 488; III, 559, 584, 591; IV, 461; V, 122, 495, 527; VI, 33, 206, 275, 330, 705
    - maps showing, III, 96; IV, 180; VI, 519
  - missionary work among, V, 699; VI, 734, 735, 740
  - movement to the Wabash, V, 192
  - names for, V, 41; VI, 271
  - peace made by, V, 139
  - peace sought by, VI, 343
  - population, I, 523; III, 584, 591, 610; IV, 572, 605; V, 495; VI, 272, 275, 499, 687, 705
  - position in Indian war, V, 527
  - reference to language of, III, 96
  - removal, V, 495; VI, 515, 516, 536
    - plans for, III, 576, 577
    - treaty concerning, VI, 488
  - resemblance to other tribes, VI, 334
  - tale relating to, V, 194
  - totems, III, 555
  - treaties with, V, 496, 497, 500; VI, 255, 380, 499
  - treaty concerning removal of, VI, 488
  - warriors, number of, III, 555, 559, 561; VI, 271
  - war with, VI, 330–331
  - west, payments to, VI, 721, 723
  - *See also* Maumes; Omameeg.

Miamisburg, size of mounds at, II, 85

Miantonimo. *See* Miontonimo.

Mica, use of, I, 93

Micabo, Algonquin culture hero, I, 18

Micamichi, a Micmac settlement, V, 677

Micamichi Indians, punishment of, V, 677
  - treaty with, V, 677

Micanopy, Chief, VI, 534

Micasuka, a Seminole village, V, 260

Micco, use of term, III, 62

Micco buiecas, or Old King, of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575

Mic co char tee, a Cussetaw Town chief, IV, 579

Miccosaukie. *See* Mickasukies.

Michabou, I, 18

Michigamea. *See* Michigamies.

Michigamies (Metchigamias, Michigania, Mitchigamas), III, 555
  - annuities of, II, 588
  - application of name, V, 191
  - beliefs and customs, V, 196
  - general account of, V, 191–196
  - location, VI, 206, 714
  - population, VI, 714
  - relations with other tribes, V, 195–196
  - totem, III, 250
  - warriors, number of, III, 555

Michigan, affairs in, in 1816, VI, 383
  - derivation of name, IV, 379
  - Indian lands in, III, 584, 586; V, 480
  - Indian population of, III, 584, 586; V, 480, 481
  - lower, Indian occupation of, VI, 361–362
  - occupation by the French, VI, 381, 382
  - population and area of, IV, 610
  - traces of Indian agriculture in, I, 55

Michigan Superintendency, statistical statement from, III, 615

Michigan tribes, condition, IV, 462–463
  - population, VI, 692

Michilimackinac, VI, 234, 237
  - American occupation of, VI, 398
  - battle at, VI, 375
  - change of garrison at, VI, 344
  - fall of, to British and Indians, VI, 356, 358
  - founding of, V, 108; VI, 185, 196
  - garrison at, III, 334
  - history, V, 648; VI, 256–258
  - illustration of, IV, 188
  - important event at, IV, 188
  - Indian name for, V, 108
  - Indian trade at, III, 353; VI, 268–269
  - Indians of, V, 143
  - removal of post of, III, 333–334
  - settlement of, V, 648
  - surrender of, VI, 234
  - transfer of fort at, I, 103

Michilimackinac—Continued
  tribe occupying, VI, 202
  See also Fort Michilimackinac.
Michilimackinac Agency, statistical statement from, III, 615
Michilimackinac Island, evidence of Indian occupation of, VI, 201
Michiskoui, III, 553
Michmacs. *See* Micmacs.
Michopdo. *See* Wachucknas.
Mickasaukies. *See* Mickasukies.
Mickasukies (Miccosaukie, Mickasaukies), attitude, in Seminole war, VI, 469
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  population, I, 522
Micksucksealton, location, III, 572
  population, III, 572; V, 706
Micmac language, classification, V, 676
  vocabulary, V, 578–589
Micmacs (Michmacs), III, 558; VI, 53
  brief account of, V, 219
  classification, III, 401
  cooking method, I, 81
  history, V, 676–678
  land claimed by, V, 678
    granted to, V, 677–678
  language, V, 676
  Milicite name for, V, 676
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 735
  number of warriors of, III, 553, 559
  settlements of, V, 677
  territory inhabited by, III, 559; V, 38, 219, 676
  warriors, number of, III, 553–559
  See also Gaspe Indians; Souriquois.
Mico, a Creek chief, V, 279
  functions, V, 279
  See also Chief.
Micures mission of Barcelona Province, IV, 556
Midawin. *See* Medawin.
Middle Village (Ottawa), census of, I, 478–487
Midēwiwin. *See* Medawin.
Miege, Rev. J. B., IV, 595
  missionary work of, V, 503, 699
Mie-mis-souks, location, IV, 498
  See also Misonk.
Miezay, or Walk-in-the-Water, signature of, II, 226
Migration, Algonquin, line of, I, 411, 414
  from Asia, route of, I, 25–26
  from Mexico into Mississippi Valley, V, 97
  into Valley of Mexico, V, 95–96
  northward trend of, IV, 132
  of hunter tribes, limit of, II, 29
  of Iowas, III, 256–259
  of North American tribes, II, 26–32
  Ojibwa, traced by traditions, II, 136–137, 139–140
  Sioux, route of, II, 172
  theories concerning, I, 22–27
  traced by pottery, I, 61; III, 76
  trend of, I, 259
  See also Migration legends.
Migration legends, Chepewyan, I, 19
  Chickasaw, I, 309–310
  Chippewa, V, 147
  Comanche, II, 126
  Creek, V, 98; VI, 186
  Iowas, Sioux, and Winnebago, V, 98
  New England and Atlantic coast tribes, V, 97–98
  Pimos, III, 296
  prairie or Dacota group, V, 98
  Quppas, Cadrons, and Kansas, V, 98
  Seminole, V, 259
  southern Indians, V, 98
  See also Origin traditions.
Mikasuki. *See* Mickasukies.
Mikonotunne. *See* Mackanotin; Maquelnoten.
Milbank Sound Indians, V, 487–488
  census of, V, 487–488
  Indian names of tribes of, V, 487–488
  language spoken by, V, 487
  location, V, 487–488
  remarks on, V, 487–488
  See also Baloballa.
Milicete (Milicite) language, Lord's Prayer in, V, 592
  numerals in, V, 690–691
Milicetes, Milicites. *See* Melecites.
Milk, Indian dislike for, V, 50
Milk River, Indians of, VI, 698
Mille Lac band, pictographic census of, II, 222
Miller, Col., Tecumseh defeated by, VI, 359
Miller, John, report by, VI, 706

Millidges, vi, 351
Milliken, J. M., antique implements possessed by, v, 666
Mills, George, information furnished by, v, 673–674
Miln, Ensign, vi, 239
Mimbreños, origin of name, v, 207
  range of, v, 207
  See also Mimbres tribe.
Mimbres tribe, labors of women of, v, 695
Minas Gerdas, bone-caves of, ii, 319
Minataree (Minetari, Minitarees, Minnatarees, Minnetarees, Minnetaries, Minnitares), vi, 687
  allies of the Mandan, iii, 251
  classification, iii, 402
  country occupied by, i, 259; iii, 594; v, 494; vi, 705
  cranial measurements, ii, 335
  identified as Gros Ventres, iii, 514
  identified as Upsarokas, iii, 403
  in the Dacota group, ii, 37
  language spoken by, i, 259
  Mandans living among, ii, 239
  name for the Crows, iii, 514
  of the Willows, iii, 251
  origin of, discussed, iii, 251
  population, i, 257, 523; iii, 251, 252, 594, 609; v, 494; vi, 687, 705
  reference to territory of, iv, 486
  skulls of, ii, 317
  smallpox among, vi, 486
  See also Hidatsa.
Minataree stock, tribes of, iii, 594–595
Minckus, a synonym of Minquas (q. v.), vi, 142
Mind, Indian, lack of originality in, i, 41
  See also Intellectual capacity.
Mineamies. *See* Menomonees.
Minerals, from California, i, 150
  in Comanche territory, i, 239
Mines, antiquity of, i, 97, 98
  gold and silver, of Mexico, iv, 451–452
  significance of ruins of, i, 71
  superstition regarding, ii, 174
  See also Copper mines; Mining.
Minetari. *See* Minataree.
Mingoes, and others, battle with, vi, 266
  application of name, iv, 616; v, 41; vi, 194, 266, 278
  attitude of, in Revolutionary War, iii, 561; vi, 278
  beginning of war with, vi, 264
  called Mengwe, vi, 138
  cranial measurements, ii, 335
  language, vi, 138
  location, iv, 620; vi, 210
  Monongahela, battle of, vi, 217, 228
  Ohio dominated by, vi, 194
  origin of name, vi, 217, 278
  relations with the English, iii, 561; vi, 213, 237
  Senecas, mentioned as, iii, 561
  settlement of, iv, 269
  warriors, estimate of, iii, 555
  western Iroquois, iv, 620
  See also Neosho Senecas.
Mini-con-gsha, a Titon division, iii, 629
  bands of, iii, 629
  country occupied by, iii, 629
  leading men of, iii, 629
Miniconjou. *See* Mini-con-gsha; Minikonga.
Minikonga, population of, v, 494
  position, v, 494
Mining, ancient aboriginal, i, 95
  area showing traces of, i, 95
  chief objects of, i, 95
  conclusions drawn from traces of, i, 95, 99
  illustration of, v, 117
  implements used in, i, 95, 96, 97; ii, 31
  methods used in, v, 116, 396; vi, 599–600
  recovery of mill used in, v, 112
  traces of, in Arkansas, i, 100–101
    in California, i, 101
    in Illinois, i, 100
    in Indiana, i, 100
    in Missouri, i, 100–101
  See also Copper mining; Mines.
Minisink. *See* Minnisink.
Minisink massacre, Masonic captives spared at, v, 673
Minitarees. *See* Minataree.
Minivoa (Ninivoan, Ninivona), ii, 259, 260, 267
  chief of the Poux, ii, 242, 281
  Pontiac joined by, ii, 243, 248

Minnatarees. *See* Minataree.
Minnetaree language, analogies of, III, 252
  brief vocabulary of, III, 256
Minnetarees, Minnetaries. *See* Minataree.
Minnisink, battle of, VI, 306–307
  meaning of name, VI, 306
Minnitarees. *See* Minataree.
Minniwawinna, mention of, V, 122
Minqua (Minquas, Minques), a name for Susquehannocks, VI, 138
  brief account of, VI, 138, 142–143
  country occupied by, VI, 138
  distinct from Mingo, VI, 138
  identified as Andastes, VI, 137, 138, 139
  purchase of land from, by the Dutch, VI, 143
  relations with Swedish Colony, VI, 142
  wars of, VI, 138
  See also Conestogo.
Minnesota, agricultural advantages of, I, 182, 183
  area of, I, 182
  climate and meteorology of, I, 183–184
  data on lands of, V, 501
  geology of, I, 186
  health and disease in, I, 184
  Indian lands in, IV, 183
  name, derivation of, I, 183; IV, 384
  physical geography, I, 181–188
  population and area of, IV, 610
Minsi. *See* Munsees.
Miontonimo (Miantonimo, Myontonimo), III, 57; IV, 613; V, 121; VI, 111, 154, 166, 173
  captive Pequots assigned to, VI, 123
  capture, VI, 126
  death, VI, 127, 167
  English war-party joined by, VI, 118
  Narragansett chief, V, 130; VI, 125
  war led by, VI, 125–127
Mirrors, stone, description of, V, 91–92
Miruelo, expedition piloted by, III, 25
  voyages of, VI, 38, 39
Misalah, a California chief, VI, 711
Miscotins. *See* Mascoutens.
Miseekwigweelis. *See* Mis-kai-whu.
Mishinowa, use of term, III, 62
Mishongnovi. *See* Manzana.
Mis-kai-whu, a Skagit division, V, 704
  location, V, 704; VI, 703
  population, V, 704; VI, 703
Miskuakes, totem of, III, 554
Miskut. *See* Agaraits.
Misonk, mention of language of, IV, 600
  See also Mie-mis-souks.
Misquekee, a name for the Foxes (q. v.), V, 41
Missaba (Missabe), the hunter's monedo, V, 436
  tradition of, V, 420
Missaugees. *See* Missisaugies.
Missinippi or Church-hill River, derivation of name, V, 40
  eastern limit of the Athapascas, II. 27
Mission band, population of, III, 632
Mission Indians, population of, V, 707; VI, 700
Missionaries, among the Eries, IV, 198-199
  efforts among Iroquois, III, 193–194
  misunderstood by Indians, V, 697
  Moravian, in Dutchess County, N. Y., V, 680–682
  result of labor of, III, 209; VI, 648
  Swiss, labors of, V, 697
  troubles in Huron country, IV, 207–208
Missionary Society Methodist Episcopal Church, missions of, VI, 738–739
Missionary Society Methodist Episcopal Church South, data on missions of, VI, 740
Missionary societies, table of statistics on, V, 502–503
Missions, among Oregon Indians, V, 655–656
  and churches, reports on, V, 698–700
  brief bibliography of works relating to, VI, 733
  California, dates of establishment, I, 520
    names of, I, 520
    population, I, 520
  Cherokee, data on, IV, 588–589
  chronological summary, VI, 734
  English, statistical data on, VI, 735
  establishment, in Onondaga country, V, 164
  failure among Pillagers, V, 188
  French, on Lake Superior, V, 184

Missions—Continued
  French, statistical data on, VI, 735
  in Apache country, V, 213
  in California, V, 214
  Indian attendance at, V, 698
  Indian language used at, V, 503
  Methodist, work of, V, 700
  of Barcelona Province, IV, 556
  of Colonial era, chronological summary of, VI, 734
  Roman Catholic, statistical data on, VI, 735
  Spanish, statistical data on, VI, 735
  statistical data on, VI, 735–741
  tables of information concerning, VI, 734–735
  to Indians, summary of, VI, 731–741
Missisagas, Missisagies, Missisaugas, Missisaugees. *See* Missisaugies.
Missisaugies (Massasauga, Messesaugues, Missaugees, Missisagas, Missisaugees, Mississagies, Mississagues, Mississaugas, Mississaugues), III, 555, 556; VI, 229, 271
  admitted to Iroquois confederacy, III, 199
  alliance with Eries, IV, 198
  allies of the Iroquois, V, 144
  application of the name, V, 144
  at siege of Fort Stanwix, VI, 292
  brief account of, III, 560; V, 144
  classification of, mistaken, III, 199; IV, 198
  country occupied by, I, 306; III, 199, 559; VI, 275
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  expelled by Iroquois, III, 291
  location given to, by Iroquois, III, 196
  missionary work among, VI, 738, 739, 740
  name, meaning, I, 306; II, 358
    synonymy, III, 517; V, 41
  of Algonquin stock, III, 199; V, 144
  origin and language, V, 144
  population, III, 199; VI, 272, 275
  relations with Iroquois, III, 196, 291; V, 144
  stand taken in Revolutionary War, VI, 278, 284
  totem, III, 555, 556
Missisaugies—Continued
  treaty signed by, VI, 255
  warriors, number of, III, 500, 555, 556, 559
  See also Wisagechroanu.
Mississa totem, VI, 100
Mississagies, Mississagues, Mississaugas, Mississaugues. *See* Missisaugies.
Mississippi [State of], admission to the Union, VI, 393
  Algonquin name, I, 135
    derivation, IV, 379
    specific meaning, III, 502
  and Alabama, Indian population of, V, 480
  Indian lands in, III, 584, 586; V, 480
  Indian population, III, 584, 586; V, 480, 481
  population and area, IV, 610
Mississippi River, British authority established on, VI, 269
  De Soto's arrival at, III, 46
  discovery of, I, 133–148; VI, 63, 448, 452
  drift power of, I, 166
  exploration of, I, 135–137; VI, 350, 384
  in Minnesota, I, 185
  sources of, I, 140, 142–148; IV, 193
    map of, I, 148; VI, 451
  tribes of, VI, 32, 33, 34, 206, 275
Mississippi Valley, accessible to Mexican tribes, V, 95
  ancient wars of, V, 61
  changes in, VI, 377–378
  character of monuments of, VI, 603
  contest for possession of, VI, 196–198
  density of population, VI, 599
  discussion of ancient civilization of, I, 71–72
  French explorations in, V, 646–648
  Indians wars in, V, 61
  occupants of, VI, 742
Mississippi Valley tribes, customs, VI, 596
  fortifications, VI, 600–601
  religion and mythology, VI, 647–657
  resemblance to Central Americans, IV, 115
  state of civilization of, V, 481

- Missouri, Indian lands in, iii, 585, 586; v, 480
  - Indian population in, iii, 585, 586; v, 480, 481
  - population and area of, iv, 610
- Missouri and Arkansas, number of Indians in, v, 480
- Missouri Indians (Missourians, Missourias, Missouries, Missouris), iii, 557; v, 450; vi, 452, 687
  - affiliations, iv, 550
  - claim concerning origin, iv, 227
  - classification, iii, 402
  - condition of iv, 466; vi, 544–546
  - country occupied by, iii, 559, 593
  - descendants of Winnebagoes, iii, 278
  - French relations with, vi, 237
  - funds required for, ii, 570
  - in the Dacota group, ii, 37
  - indigenous to Kansas, vi, 536
  - lands, iv, 573
    - ceded by, ii, 603
    - purchased from, ii, 600
    - statistics on, ii, 606
    - surrendered by, v, 494; vi, 456
  - location, iv, 461; v, 494; vi, 705
  - members of Pontiac's Confederacy, ii, 307
  - of Siouan stock, i, 197
  - population, i, 523; iii, 593; iv, 573; v, 494; vi, 687, 706
  - reference to territory of, iv, 486
  - treaty with, statement of, v, 497
  - warriors, estimate of, iii, 557, 559
- Missouri River, expedition to source of, vi, 349
  - Indian name for, ii, 162
  - ruins of villages on, vi, 556
- Missouri River tribes, vi, 556, 695
  - census of, vi, 556, 695–696
- Missouri Valley, Indian population of, iii, 630–631
- Mitchell, Col. D. D., ii, 239
  - Blackfeet described by, v, 685–687
  - paper on the Mandans, iii, 253–254
  - population report by, vi, 695
  - quoted on condition of tribes, vi, 554
  - report of, iii, 250
  - vocabulary transmitted by, ii, 218; iii, 252
- Mitcheltree, Mr., ruins on farm of, i, 123
- Mitchigamas. *See* Michigamies.
- Mitomkai Pomo. *See* Betumke.
- Mix, Charles E., report made by, iv, 582
- Mixed bloods, characteristics of, iv, 101
  - Chippewa, population of, vi, 692
  - hair, iii, 377, 378, 384
  - hunting activities, iv, 101–102
  - of California, i, 520
  - *See also* Intermarriage.
- Mizquite bean, described, ii, 105
- Mnemonic devices, for music, ii, 226–228
  - illustrated, ii, 228
  - on wood, i, 339
  - totems used as, v, 75
  - use of, i, 361, 401–411; iv, 663
- Moache. *See* Taos Utahs.
- Möal-kai band, at Clear Lake council, iii, 109
- Mobilians, a name for the Choctaws, ii, 34; iii, 29; vi, 627
  - perpetual fire of, v, 68; vi, 627–628
  - sun worship of, v, 68
  - tribes composing, v, 68
  - use of name, ii, 344; vi, 47
- Moccasin game, Dacotah, described, iv, 64–65
- Moccasins, illustrations of, iii, 65
  - making of, iii, 65–66
  - materials and ornamentation, v, 182
  - tribe denoted by style of, iii, 66
- Mock-pu-we-chastah, interpretation by, of Seven Fires, ii 169
- Mocoso, Chief, mention of, ii, 34
- Mohacks. *See* Mohawks.
- Mohaekanuc, a synonym of Mohegan (q. v.), iv, 539
- Mohaves, vi, 687
  - map showing location of, iv, 24
  - *See* Mah-ha-os.
- Mohawk language, list of works in, iv 526–527
  - note on, iv, 554
  - vocabulary of, ii, 482–493
- Mohawk Valley, raids in, vi, 313
- Mohawks (Mohacks, Mohocks) vi, 687
  - aid of, sought by Philip, vi, 168
  - at siege of Fort Stanwix, vi, 292
  - classification, iii, 401

Mohawks—Continued
    cranial measurements, II, 335
    division of the Iroquois, IV, 204
    English aided by, in battle, VI, 220, 224
    hunting grounds, VI, 714
    Huron country invaded by, V, 647
    in battle of Lake George, VI, 287
    in the Revolutionary War, V, 510, 513; VI, 283, 284
    in valley of Connecticut River, V, 226
    location, III, 590; V, 668; VI, 147, 275, 714
    missionary work among, III, 193–194; VI, 734, 735, 736, 738, 739, 740
    one of the Five Nations, III, 184
    one of the Six Nations, IV, 616
    other names for, III, 527
    population, IV, 603, 604; V, 668; VI, 275, 687, 714
    power of, III, 185–186
    relations with the English, VI, 209
    remnants of tribes sheltered by, VI, 146
    retreat to Canada, IV, 604
    sachem of, VI, 281
    Sassacus killed by, VI, 123
    summer residence of, VI, 101
    war with Andastes, VI, 142
    warriors, number of, III, 561; IV, 605; VI, 261, 270
    See also Auniers; Maquas.
Moheconnock. *See* Mohicans.
Mohegan language, V, 618–620
    Algonquin dialect, II, 341
    brief vocabulary of, V, 620
    catechism in, described, IV, 539–540
    reference to preservation of, III, 96
Mohegan [village], number of Mohegans at, I, 524
Mohegans (Mohigans), VI, 430
    called Stockbridges, V, 41
    land claimed by, III, 583
    location, III, 583
    migrations, IV, 563
    population, I, 524; III, 583
    reference to dialect, III, 96
    removal of, VI, 516
    tradition of, II, 23–24
Mohicanic group, description of, VI, 109–112
Mohicans (Moheconnock, Mohiccans, Mohickanders, Mohickons, Mohikinder), VI, 259, 687
    branch of the Pequots, VI, 125
    called Stockbridges, VI, 324
    classification, III, 401; V, 145
    colonies aided by, VI, 334
    conquered by Iroquois, II, 37; III, 74; V, 137
    country occupied by, VI, 32, 33, 116, 147
    division of the Lenapi Algonquins, VI, 100, 116
    first contact with Whites, VI, 42
    hunting grounds, VI, 714
    identification, III, 74
    in league with Nanticokes and Shawnees, VI, 132
    land confirmed to, VI, 324
    language, VI, 111
    location, V, 122, 668; VI, 714
    migration tradition, V, 98
    missionary work among, VI, 734, 736
    name, origin of, III, 74; V, 38; VI, 116
    population, V, 668; VI, 714
    reference to feud of, VI, 173
    remarks on, VI, 687
    stand taken by, in Revolutionary War, VI, 277, 280, 293
    state of culture of, V, 107
    warriors, number of, VI, 261
    Whites joined by, in Pequot War, VI, 117–118
    withdrawal, from the Hudson, VI, 133
    See also Mahicans.
Mohiccans, Mohickanders, Mohickons. *See* Mohicans.
Mohigan John, VI, 259
Mohigans. *See* Mohegans.
Mohikinder. *See* Mohicans.
Mohock River, tribe dwelling on, VI, 714
Mohocks. *See* Mohawks.
Moi-ya, language and location of, III, 112
Molala. *See* Molallas.
Molallas (Molealleg, Mole Alleg, Molele, Mollales, Moolalles), classification, III, 402
    location, V, 492
        maps showing, III, 96, 200
    population, I, 521; III, 632; V, 492

Mole Alleg, Molealleg, Molele, Mollales. *See* Molallas.
Momo, a Shoshonie chief, VI, 697
Monacan dialects, enumeration of, by Jefferson, III, 292
Monacan language, III, 292
Monacans, brief account of, v, 35
  decline of, v, 37
  location, v, 42
  of Iroquois stock, v, 42
  tribes composing, v, 36
Monadnock, etymology of name, v, 593
Monahooe, a Creek prophet, VI, 373
  activities, VI, 374
  death, VI, 373
Monckton, Gen., commander at Fort Pitt, VI, 241
Moncrevie (Moncrovie), J. B., vocabulary furnished by, II, 343, 494
Mondamin, illustration of feast of, VI, 385
  legend of, II, 230
Monedo, Moneto. *See* Manito.
Money, substitutes for, I, 84–85
Mong, sachem-priest, I, 107
  reference to village of, I, 117
Mong tribe, I, 117
Monge, Juan Mateo, extract from diary of, III, 301–303
Mongolian origin of Indian tribes, theory of, v, 61–62
Mongolian race, branches of, IV, 356
  civilian, IV, 356
  country occupied by, IV, 356, 357
  heads of, described, IV, 356
Mong-o-zid, chief of Lake Superior Indians, II, 161
Mongul race, conquest of India by, v, 58
Monhagan, VI, 174
Monhagan (Monhegan) Island, inscription found on, VI, 608
  illustration of, VI, 611
Moningwunakaun (Mo-ning-wun-a-kán-ing), chief Ojibwa town, II, 136
  town and island of, II, 137, 138
Monk mound, IV, 128
  comparison of, with Toltec structure, I, 47
Monomonees, Monomonies. *See* Menomonees.
Monongahela River, battle on, VI, 216
  effect of defeat on, VI, 219
  Indian murders on, VI, 305
Mononotto, a Pequot warrior, VI, 122
  death of, VI, 123
Monroe, President James, belief of, concerning Indians, VI, 482
  letter to the Senate, III, 573–575
  plans for the Indians, IV, 180, 459–460, 484
  state of tribes under, VI, 279–417
Monsees. *See* Munsees.
Mons-o-mo, Pillager warrior, II, 165
Monsoni. *See* Morisons.
Monster period, antique osteology of, I, 173–175
Mont Royal, named by Cartier, I, 134
Montagnais (Montagnars, Montagnes, Montagnies, Montainiers), classification, III, 401
  country occupied by, I, 306; IV, 540
  included in Algonquin group, II, 36
  meaning of name, v, 40
  not an independent tribe, v, 40
  See also Kebiks; Sheshatapoosh.
Montagnais language, publications in, IV, 540
Montagnars, Montagnes, Montagnies, Montainiers. *See* Montagnais.
Montauk tribe, remnant of, II, 542
Montcalm, death of, VI, 234
  Fort William Henry taken by, VI, 221–222
Montezuma, I, 21
  exaggeration of status of, v, 88
  reference to menagerie of, IV, 93
  statement by, to Cortez, v, 106
  tradition of, v, 687–688
  tradition related by, I, 19
Montezuma II, VI, 743
  death of, VI, 743
Montgomery, Col., campaign against the Cherokees, VI, 240–241
Montour, Capt., VI, 230
Montour, Catherine, confused with Queen Esther, v, 670, 671, 672
  residence of, v, 672
  supposed burial place of, v, 673–674
  town named for, v, 672
  visit to Philadelphia, v, 673
Montour, Esther. *See* Queen Esther.
Montour, Madame, service rendered by, IV, 326, 327
Montowampate, mention of wife of, v, 237
  sagamore of Saugus, v, 237

Montreal, site of Indian village, IV, 383; V, 76; VI, 200, 743
  surrender to English, VI, 234
  tribes dwelling near, VI, 714
  See also Hochelaga.
Montreal River, falls of, illustrated, IV, 187
Monuments, antiquarian, lack of, among California tribes, V, 217
  lack of, among Winnebagoes, IV, 236
  of the hunter state of man, I, 44–46
  proving Scandinavian visits, IV, 119
Monusk, Chief, battle led by, VI, 266
Mooer, Hazen, quoted on divisions of the Yanktons, II, 169
Moolalles. *See* Molallas.
Moon, beliefs concerning, V, 417
  corn planted according to, I, 272
  dance to, IV, 63–64
  Muscogee beliefs concerning, I, 271, 272
  symbol of, in pictographs, V, 64
Moore, Col., reference to expedition of, VI, 185
Moose, range of, I, 433
Moques, Moquies. *See* Moquis.
Moqui province, identification of, IV, 33, 38
Moqui villages (pueblos), IV, 216; VI, 709
  description, IV, 81–82
  interrelations of, I, 519
  language, V, 689
  likened to seven cities of Cibola, IV, 87
  location, I, 519
  Navajo names for, IV, 220
  population, I, 519; V, 484
  reached by Spanish expedition, IV, 25
Moquis (Moques, Moquies), VI, 687
  brief account of, I, 244
  ceremony to bring rain, IV, 82
  characteristics, I, 519
  cotton fabrics made by, IV, 33
  dance for rain, IV, 83–85
  description by Garces, III, 298
  manners and customs, IV, 72–91
  map showing location of, III, 96; IV, 24
  origin of sheep of, III, 309
  peacemakers for Navajoes, IV, 210
Moquis—Continued
  population, I, 244, 245, 519; III, 633; IV, 85; VI, 687
    semiagricultural, IV, 72
  reference to weaving of, V, 106
  seven villages of, IV, 33
  state of arts of, V, 204
  supposed descent, II, 29
  symbol representing, III, 307
  symbolic message from, to the President, III, 306–308
Morai-uh, a Klamath River tribe and village, III, 138, 634
Moran, G., vocabulary by, II, 458
Morau, M., English warned by, at siege of Detroit, II, 257
Moravian Church, statistics on activities of, VI, 741
  See also Church of the United Brethren.
Moravian mission, in Dutchess County, N. Y., V, 138, 680
Moravians, at Shamokin, IV, 617
  first visit to Connecticut, V, 682
  influence with Delawares, VI, 316–317
  missionary labors of, V, 680–682
  received at Shamokin, IV, 616
  work of, IV, 540
Morgan, James, III, 382
Morisons, III, 556
  totem of, III, 556
  warriors, number of, III, 556
Mormons, location of settlement of, I, 220
  relations with Indians, V, 198, 199
  treachery to Indians, V, 201
  Utah hostility to, IV, 597
Morris, Capt., duty assigned to, VI, 254
Morris, Robert H., petition signed by, III, 618
Morris, Rev. Thomas, IV, 346
Morse, Dr. Jedediah, investigations of, VI, 421
Mortars, illustration of, I, 88
  manner of using, illustrated, IV, 175
  stone, method of making, VI, 598
Mortars and pestles, description of, III, 466
  illustrations of, II, 90; III, 228, 467
  of California Indians, III, 206–207
  See also Pestles.

- Morton, Dr. Samuel George, iii, 250
  - cited on physical organization, iii, 374
  - objects from collection of, ii, 89
  - physical traits of Indians described by, ii, 38
  - physical types discussed by, ii, 315–331
  - quoted on unity of tribes, vi, 573
  - reference to opinions of, iii, 250
  - studies of, v, 243, 287
  - work of, iv, 350
- Mortuary customs. *See* Burial customs; Burials; Graves; Mourning customs; Ossuaries.
- Mortuary pottery, description of, i, 84
  - *See also* Burial urn; Funeral vase.
- Moscoso (Muscoso), De Soto's campmaster, iii, 42
  - successor to De Soto, ii, 35; iii, 49; vi, 67
  - termination of expedition under, vi, 68
- Moshoquen, mentioned by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
- Moultrie, Dr., cranium discussed by, ii, 320
- Mound builders, conclusions regarding, iii, 393; iv, 147–148
  - cultivation of corn by, ii, 30
  - descendants, iv, 135–136
  - discord among, ii, 30
  - discussion of identity, v, 135
  - from Mexican latitudes, i, 64
  - in Pennsylvania, iv, 326
  - mines worked by, i, 97
  - northern limit of, i, 56
  - place in scale of civilization, i, 71
  - religion, i, 72
  - sedentary life of, i, 50–51
  - theories concerning, iv, 132–136
  - traditions of wars of, iv, 136–137
- Mound period, termination of, vi, 600
- "Mound prairie," v, 664
  - proposed examination of, v, 665
- Mounds, ii, 83–85
  - age of, iv, 129–131, 137
  - altars buried in, i, 73
  - animal-shaped, i, 59
  - antique pottery from, iii, 77–82
  - articles of copper in, i, 67
  - as altars, i, 51–52; iv, 126

Mounds—Continued

  - as places of offering and sacrifice, i, 51
  - as places of worship, i, 72
  - as refuge from floods, iv, 127; v, 110–111
  - at Marietta, opening of, iv, 131–132
  - average size, iv, 123–124
  - built as redoubts, i, 51; iv, 128
  - burial, explanation of, iii, 78
  - burials in, iii, 78; iv, 56, 114, 126, 127, 129–130, 131
  - ceremonial use of, vi, 593
  - character and number of, questioned, iv, 144–145
  - Chickasaw name for, i, 311
  - classification, iv, 127
  - date of, probable, iv, 137
  - designed for residence, iii, 77
  - diverse conclusions regarding, iv, 145
  - dwellings on, ii, 83–84; iv, 124–125, 134
  - effigy, discussion of, i, 52–53, 59
  - Florida, age and size of, iii, 77–78
    - vessel from, i, 94
  - garden beds, connection with, i, 60
  - gateways to, i, 48
  - gradual growth of, iv, 128, 129
  - in Sioux country, iv, 67
  - in Virginia, vi, 609
  - Indian ignorance concerning, i, 14
  - intrusive objects in, iv, 132
  - location, ii, 70; iv, 125, 128
  - Lybian characters identified in, i, 37
  - measurements, vi, 599
  - of diluvial formation, iv, 146
  - of the Dacota country, ii, 176
  - of the Mississippi Valley, ii, 69
  - on agricultural lands, i, 64
  - on Alabama River, v, 282–283
  - on the Pocotaligo, ii, 89
  - opinion of Winnebagoes on, iv, 231
  - opinion regarding, of early explorers, v, 108
  - origin, possible, i, 355
  - Peruvian and Mississippi Valley, v, 93
  - pipes found in, i, 68
  - plate showing dimensions, i, 52
  - platform, explanation of, iv, 125, 130

Mounds—Continued
  purpose, I, 179; IV, 56, 114, 125–127; V, 104
  religious origin, I, 61
  resembling teocalli of Mexico, IV, 123
  sacrificial, IV, 126, 128
  Serpent, interpretation of, I, 32
  size of, IV, 124, 125
  small, over burials, II, 69
  totemic, I, 52–53; IV, 128, 666
  truncated, explanation of, V, 30
  types of, three, I, 61
  use, in warfare, I, 64–65
  vessel from, illustrated, I, 94
  West Virginia, articles found in, I, 121–122
    exploration of, I, 120–121
  with ditches, IV, 126
  See also Grave Creek Mound; Monk Mound; Tumuli.
Mount Hope, seat of the Pokanokets, VI, 150, 154, 155
Mount Hope government, territory included in, VI, 115
Mount Juliet, occupied by Illinese, V, 192
Mount Pitt, origin of name of, III, 165
Mount Royal, naming of, VI, 57
Mount Shasté, description of, III, 165
Mountain Indians, population of, II, 27
Mountaineers, a synonym of Montagnais (q. v.), IV, 540
  synonym of Nopeming (q. v.), IV, 554
Mountpleasant, John, Tuscarora chief, II, 541
Mourning customs, V, 59, 105
  California Indian, IV, 225–226
  Chinook, VI, 621–622
  Comanche, I, 237; II, 68, 133–134; V, 685
  Dacotah, III, 243; IV, 66
  Delaware, V, 685
  Kenisteno, described, V, 168
    illustrated, V, 168
  Oregon Indian, V, 655
  Osage, V, 685
  sentiment expressed in, III, 327
  similar to Jewish, I, 261–262
  use of black in, II, 68
  Winnebago, IV, 55
  See also Burial customs.
Moving of camp, II, 76–77, 79
Muckeleses, a Creek town, V, 262
Mucoso, Chief, III, 37, 38
  derivation of name, III, 29
Mudjeekewis, a Chippewa magistrate, V, 147
Muhlenberg, Hiester H., translation made by, IV, 324
Muhzheguning, census of band at, I, 458–467
Mukickans, warriors of, IV, 605
  See also Mahicans.
Mukkundwas, origin of name, V, 145, 184
  See also Pillagers.
Muk-ud-a-chib, Sisseton attacked by, II, 165
Muk-ud-a-waun-o-quod, noted Pillager warrior, II, 165
Mukundua, Mukundwa. *See* Mukkundwas.
Mule-dung, a Comanche chief, II, 128
Mul-lat-te-co, a Tuolumne band, IV, 407
Multnomah, location of, III, 570
  population, III, 570
Mumford, Joseph, information furnished by, IV, 153
Mummies, Egyptian, hair of, III, 393
  Indian, explanation of, VI, 622
  South American, hair of, III, 383
Munceys. *See* Munceys and Christian Indians; Munsees.
Munceys and Christian Indians, location and population of, V, 495
  removal of, V, 495
Mundau. *See* Mundua.
Mundua (Mundau, Mundwa), VI, 35
  exterminated by Ojibwas, II, 136, 140
  war with Chippewas, V, 39
Mundwa. *See* Mundua.
Munro, Col., Fort William Henry defended by, VI, 221–222
Munroe, Gov., IV, 210; VI, 709
Munsays. *See* Munsees.
Munsees (Minsi, Monsees, Munceys, Munsays, Munsies), VI, 133, 488, 687
  affiliations, IV, 617
  also called Delawares, V, 41

Munsees—Continued
  and Delawares, brief account of, III, 561
    location and population of, VI, 275
    warriors of, III, 561
  annuities of, II, 588
  classification, III, 401; V, 145
  connection with Delawares, III, 592
  country occupied by, V, 495, 668, 669; VI, 32, 705, 714
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  divisions, VI, 147
  emigration, VI, 504, 505
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  included in Christian Indians, V, 506
  language spoken by, II, 341
  Lenno Lenapees, a totemic division of, VI, 147
  migrations, VI, 317
  population, I, 523; V, 495, 668; VI, 275, 687, 705, 707, 714
  reference to dialect of, III, 96
  removal, V, 495; VI, 516, 536
  Senecas joined by, III, 561
  subjection of, by Iroquois, II, 37; IV, 617
  See also Munceys and Christian Indians; Stockbridges and Munsees.
Munsies. *See* Munsees.
Murder, punishment for, I, 277; II, 183; V, 653
Murek. *See* Morai-uh.
Murphey, census of neighborhood of, I, 508–517
Murphy, Henry C., petition signed by, III, 618
Mur-til-par, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census of, V, 488
Muscalaroes, Muscaleros. *See* Mescaleros.
Muscle Shoals, reference to, III, 346
Muscoculges. *See* Muskogees.
Muscodanig, a synonym of Miscotins (Mascoutens, q. v.), V, 41
Muscogee (Muscogulgee) Confederacy. *See* Muskogees.
Muscogee language. *See* Muskogee language.
Muscogees, Muscogies, Muscogulges. *See* Muskogees.
Muscoso. *See* Moscoso.
Museum, anthropological, suggestion regarding, IV, 660
Mushalatubbee, a Choctaw district, IV, 582
Mushkeags, country occupied by, VI, 33
  See also Maskigos; Muskegos.
Mushkodains (Mushcodainsug, Mushkodainsug), account of, I, 307
  garden beds attributed to, I, 59
  identified as Mascoutens, I, 307
  ossuaries attributed to, I, 69
  See also Mascoutens.
Mushulatubbee, annuity provided for, VI, 403
Music, Indian:
  Carib, II, 312
  Chippewa war song, V, 562
  chorus in, IV, 71
  mnemonic symbols for, II, 226–228
  simplicity of, IV, 71
  time in, observance of, II, 514
  use of reeds in, IV, 73–74
  See also Chants; Music-boards; Musical instruments; Songs.
Music boards, I, 361–362
  explanation of, VI, 606
  lacking among Sioux, IV, 71
  pictographs on, I, 112
Musical instruments, antique Mexican, VI, 580, 588
  California Indian, V, 650
  Dacotah, IV, 71
  description of, II, 514
  illustrations of, II, 514
  Klamath Indian, III, 173
  Pueblo, IV, 74
  use of, II, 514
  See also Drum; Flute; Rattles.
Mus-ka-le-ras. *See* Mescaleros.
Muskegos (Muskegoes, Muskigoes), also called Nopemings, V, 41
  origin and meaning of the name, V, 145
  reference to food of, I, 41
  separation of, from Ojibwas, II, 139
  See also Maskigos; Mushkeags.

Musketoons, III, 561
  collective name for Weas, Piankashaws, etc., VI, 275
  warriors, III, 561
  See also Mascoutens.
Muskhogean stock. *See* Apalachians; Chocta-Muskhog.
Muskigoes. *See* Muskegos.
Muskingum River, Indians of, VI, 207, 260, 275, 714
Muskingum towns, expedition against, VI, 317–318
Muskogee (Muscogee, Muskokee) language, dialects of, I, 268
  geographical names in, with derivation, IV, 380–381
  publications in, IV, 546
  vocabulary of (numerals), II, 220; IV, 416–429
  See also Creek language.
Muskogees (Muscoculges, Muscogees, Muscogies, Muskhogee, Muskhoghee), V, 99, 251–283
  account of, I, 265–283
  allies of the French, VI, 237
  attempt to gather statistics on, V, 482
  beliefs, I, 269, 271, 272
  calendar system, I, 271–272
  census, IV, 575–581
  Chicoreans incorporated with, III, 96
  classification, I, 197; III, 29, 401; V, 42
  country of, described, I, 269–270
  cranial capacity, II, 335; V, 244
  creation myth, I, 266
  De Soto in territory of, I, 134
  forts erected by, V, 110
  head flattening among, II, 325
  linguistic relations, III, 404
  location, I, 266; V, 577; VI, 32
  metal plates of, illustrated, III, 89
    preserved by, III, 88–90
  migration, I, 267; II, 32
  name, origin of, VI, 333
    for the Creeks, V, 504; VI, 47, 333
    former, II, 32
    synonomy, I, 266
  origin, II, 84
    claim, IV, 148
  peace negotiated by, VI, 332–333
Muskogees—Continued
  period of supremacy, V, 115
  population, I, 266
  reference to Salic law of, III, 40
  tribes conquered by, II, 32; III, 27
  See also Creeks; Machecous.
Muskrat, hunting of, II, 51
Musquakeys (Musquiakis) and others, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
    hunting grounds, VI, 714
    population, VI, 714
  warriors, estimate of, III, 555
  See also Foxes.
Musquatons and others, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  population, VI, 714
Musquiakis. *See* Musquakeys.
Musquins, Mexican name for Oraivaz, IV, 87
Musquitans (Musquitons), dwelling grounds, VI, 714
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  population, VI, 714
  warriors, estimate of, III, 554
  See also Mascoutens.
Mustees and Mulattoes, number of, at California missions, I, 520
Mutilation, self, as a sign of mourning, II, 134
Muzzinabiks, inscriptions called, VI, 605, 606
Myeengun, Chief, inscription recording exploits of, I, 406, 414
Mynomanies and others, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  population, VI, 714
  See also Menominee.
Myontonimo. *See* Miontonimo.
Mystic River, Pequot fort on, VI, 118, 121
Mythology, V, 406–411
  and oral tradition, I, 316–332
  importance of study of, IV, 660
  Indian, basic theory of, II, 435
  lack among Comanche, I, 237
  of Mississippi Valley tribes, VI, 647–657
  of the Algonquins, IV, 255; VI, 658–663
  of the Chippewa, V, 149–150
  of the Dacotahs, III, 231–246

Mythology—Continued
  of the Six Nations, vi, 666–670
  oriental and occidental, coincidences in, iv, 664
  Toltec and Aztec, vi, 636–646
  See also Gods.
Myths. *See* Legends; Origin traditions.

N

Naagutl. *See* Nai-a-gutl.
Naamikeke, "Christian Indians" at, v, 225
Naa nee aa ghee, a Stikeen River tribe, v, 489
  census of, v, 489
Naass, listed as a linguistic family, iii, 402
Nabaduchoes. *See* Nabedaches.
Nabajos. *See* Navajoes.
Nabanois, chief, Chippewa leader, i, 304
Nabedaches (Nabaduchoes), brief account of, i, 239
  classification, iii, 402
Nabhow, mention of wife of, v, 237
Nabil-tse language, probably from Rogue's River, iii, 423
  See also Hoopah language.
Naboh, a California band, iii, 116
Nacado-cheets, brief account of, i, 239
  See also Nacogdoches.
Na-che-ning-a, Iowa chief, characterization of, iii, 265
Nacogdoches, missionary work among, vi, 734
  See also Nacado-cheets.
Nacook, derivation of name, v, 225
Naddod, of Norway, discovery made by, vi, 742
Nadowa, Algonquin name for Iroquois, iii, 292; vi, 236
Nadowaig (Nodowaig, Nod-o-ways), a synonym of Iroquois, ii, 136; v, 39
  defeat by Ojibwas, ii, 149
  enemies of Chippewas (Ojibwa), ii, 136; v, 39
Nadowasie [Sioux], vi, 687
Nado-wassies (Iroquois), a name for the Iroquois, vi, 194
  foes of Adirondacks, vi, 194
Nadowegoning, meaning of name, iv, 383
Nadowesies, v, 647
Naemkeck, listed by Capt. John Smith. v, 218
Nago-nabe, head of Mille Lac band, ii, 222
Nagondagon, census of band at, i, 458–467
Nahane. *See* Nohannies.
Nah-dah-waig, a synonym of Iroquois, v, 193
Nahuatlacs, traditions of, v, 96
Nai-aguth, a Klamath River tribe, iii, 634
Nai-a-gutl, a village on Klamath River, iii, 138
Naikun. *See* Ne coon.
Naimkeak, a synonym of Amoskeag (q. v.), v, 222
Naked-head, a Comanche chief, ii, 128
Nakoaktok. *See* Nar kock tau.
Naloh, a California tribe, vi, 711
Namabin River, inscription on rocks of, i, 406
Namaha River, tribe on, vi, 548
Namanamin, population unknown, i, 521
Namansket, Indian attack on, vi, 165
Namaoskeag(s), application of the name, v, 223, 224
  location, v, 221
  name, variants of, v, 221–222
  village at, v, 224
  See also Amoskeag; Namaske.
Namaske (Namaskeke, Namaskike), a synonym of Amoskeag, v, 222, 234
  Indian fishing place, v, 232, 233
  location, v, 225, 234
  See also Amoskeag; Namaoskeag.
Namaskeke, Namaskiki. *See* Namaske.
Nambe, language, v, 689
  population, iii, 633; vi, 687, 709
  remarks, vi, 687
Nameanilieu, number of warriors, iii, 556
  totems, iii, 556
Names, aboriginal American, with etymology, iii, 510–549
  miscellaneous, of Indian origin [letter B], iv, 554–564
  of Chippewa delegation, i, 417–420
  of Indian origin [A to Z], v, 535–542
  of the dead, custom concerning, vi, 633

Names—Continued
  of tribes, confusion in, VI, 137
    for themselves, VI, 572–573
    popular, I, 195
  of villages, source of, II, 171
  See also Names, geographical; Names, personal; Naming customs; Place names.
Names, geographical, Algonquin, with derivations, IV, 379–380
  Dacotah, with derivations, IV, 384
  Iroquois, with derivations, IV, 381–384
  left by Algonquins, III, 75
  list with derivations, IV, 379–384
  Muscogee, with derivations, IV, 380–381
  Nézperce, I, 226
  of Indian origin [letter C], III, 501–509; V, 570–577
  suggestions for, V, 621–625
  tribes located by, IV, 667
  See also Place names.
Names, personal, aversion to use of, IV, 217
  bestowal of, III, 189; VI, 660
  lists of, with meanings, IV, 377–379
  of the "Cushna" tribe, II, 507–508
  secret nature, II, 66
  sources, I, 34; II, 65–66; III, 61; IV, 377–379
  taboos concerning, II, 196; VI, 633
  See also Naming customs.
Nameuilini. *See* Nameailieu.
Naming customs, Algonquin, VI, 660
  Comanche, II, 132
  concerning animals, III, 153
  Dacotah, III, 234, 240
  See also Names.
Namoit, population unknown, I, 521
Nanabozho. *See* Manabozho.
Nanamacomuck, brief account of, V, 237
Nanandawi idiwa, a healing ceremony, V, 437–440
Nandakoes, classification of, III, 402
  See also Anadarko.
Nanticokes (Nanticos), V, 137; VI, 141
  alliance made by, VI, 132
  and others, population of, VI, 270
  classification, III, 401
  colony in territory of, VI, 744
  country occupied by, V, 38, 668; VI, 131, 714
Nanticokes—Continued
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  identical with Conoys, VI, 132
  in league with Iroquois, VI, 132
  language of, reference to, II, 36
  location of, VI, 131
  migrations, IV, 563; VI, 132
  population, V, 668; VI, 714
  subjection to Iroquois, IV, 617
Nanticos. *See* Nanticokes.
Nantucket Indians (Nantuckets), affiliations of, VI, 150
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 736
Na-po-batin(s), a collective name, III, 110
  language, III, 110
Nar-a-tah, Waco name for Comanches, II, 126
Narent Chouan, number of warriors at, III, 553
Nar kock tau, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census of, V, 488
Narragansett Bay, Indians living on, VI, 103
Narragansetts, VI, 113, 114, 115, 430, 687
  chief of, VI, 173
  classification, III, 401
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  derivation of name, V, 38
  feud of, reference to VI, 173
  in King Philip's War, VI, 154, 155, 172
  land claimed by, III, 583
  location, III, 583; V, 218; VI, 125
  migration tradition, V, 98
  overthrow, VI, 166–167
  population, I, 524; III, 583; VI, 687
  relations with the English, VI, 111, 125–126
  slaughter of, VI, 163
  treaty made with, VI, 155
  tribal circle, VI, 173
  wars of, VI, 125–127; 161–167
Narvaez, Pamphilio de, Creek opposition to, VI, 369
  defeat by Cortez, VI, 743
    by Indians, V, 410
  difficulties encountered by, III, 33
  discovery made by, I, 133
  expedition of, I, 135; II, 20–21; III, 28–33; VI, 44–47, 58, 743

Narvaez—Continued
    hostility to, cause of, III, 26
    relations with Indians, II, 33–34
Nascapee. *See* Scoffies.
Nashoways. *See* Nashuas.
Nashua, Eliot's preaching at, V, 233
Nashua River, meaning of the name, V, 221
Nashuas (Nashoways), affiliations of, VI, 150
    land occupied by, V, 221
    subservient to Pennacooks, V, 222
Nasomah (Nassoma), a Rogue River band, VI, 702
    census, V, 492; VI, 702
Nass Indians, census of, V, 487
    Indian names for tribes of, V, 487
    language spoken by, V, 487
    location, V, 487
Nass River, tribes of, V, 487
Nassaque, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Nassoma. *See* Nasomah.
Nasumi. *See* Nasomah.
Nasutan, Eliot aided by, VI, 107, 530
Natacooks, origin of the name, V, 221
    synonym of Souhegan, V, 221
Nataotin. *See* Nateotetains.
Nat-che-to, Chief, V, 198
Natchez, a Creek town, V, 262
Natchez (Natches, Nauchee, Nautches), IV, 614; V, 115
    absorbed by Creeks, VI, 370
    Appalachian by conquest, V, 42
    called Chigantualga, V, 99
    classification, II, 343, 345; III, 401; VI, 31, 47
    conquered by Creeks, VI, 365
    country occupied by, III, 559; VI, 32
    Creek nation, part of the, V, 260
    decline of, VI, 628
    extermination of, II, 324
    fire worship among, V, 67
    government, VI, 626–627
    head flattening among, II, 324
    hostility to De Soto, III, 49
    language, I, 268; II, 32; III, 404; V, 99
    maps showing location, II, 28; V, 253
    medical practices, VI, 632
    mound-building, IV, 148
    origin tradition, V, 61; VI, 32
Natchez—Continued
    perpetual fire of, V, 68
    population, IV, 381; VI, 272
    sun worship, IV, 639; V, 68, 103; VI, 626–628
    unclassified, II, 33
    warriors, estimate of number, III, 555, 559
Natchitoches, classification of, III, 402
    location, III, 585, 596
    population, III, 585, 596
Nateotetains, population of, II, 28
Natheldianeh, signer of treaty, VI, 144
Natic (Natick) Indians, cranial capacity of, V, 244
        measurements, II, 335
    influence of civilization on, VI, 125
    missionary work among, VI, 734
Natic language, Bible in, described, IV, 529–530
    classification, V, 145–146
    list of words from, V, 39
    so called by Eliot, VI, 108
    vocabulary, V, 556–557
Natic (Natick) village, Indians at, I, 287; V, 225
    meaning of name, V, 225
Natick. *See* Natic.
Natio perticarum, a synonym of Andastes, VI, 137
National Observatory, expedition from, V, 93
Natootetains, an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
Naticook (Natticook), a Pennacook village, V, 230
    derivation of name, V, 225
Nauchee. *See* Natchez.
Naumkeag, a synonym of Amoskeag, V, 222
    cranial measurements, II, 335
    See also Amoskeag.
Naüni (Na-üni, Na-u-ni), classification of, II, 343
    Comanche name for themselves, II, 126
    meaning of name, II, 126
    population, I, 518
    synonym of Comanches, II, 125
    See also Comanches.
Nauniem. *See* No-na-um.
Nautches. *See* Natchez.

Nautowas, alliance with Menomonie, i, 304
  See also Iroquois.
Navaho. *See* Navajoes.
Navajo blankets. *See* Blankets.
Navajo language, affinities, iv, 217; v, 203, 689
  numerals, iv, 429–431
  vocabulary, iv, 416–429
Navajoes (Nabajos, Navahoes), iv, 82, 83; vi, 687
  account of, i, 243; iv, 209–215, 217–220
  and Utahs, described, v, 200
  arts of, state of, v, 204
  beliefs of, vi, 568
  characteristics, i, 519; iv, 209, 211
  comparative civilization of, iv, 218
  country of, described, iv, 209, 211–212
  creation myth, iv, 89–91, 218–220
  dialect of, mentioned, v, 203
  expedition against, i, 246; iv, 209–211
  ill treatment of, iv, 211, 215
  illustration showing country of, iv, 210
  life of, iv, 89
  linguistic affinities, iv, 217; v, 203, 689
  manners and customs, iv, 72–91
  map showing location, iii, 96; iv, 24
  marriage customs, iv, 214
  missionary work among, v, 503
  nomadic nature, iii, 70; iv, 213
  population, i, 244, 245, 519; iv, 214, 220; v, 484, 498; vi, 687, 705
  Pueblos harassed by, iv, 81
  reputed builders of "Casas Grande," iii, 297
  sheep of, origin of, iii, 309
  social organization, iv, 211
  supposed descent of, ii, 29
  territory occupied by, iv, 216; vi, 705
  traditions of, v, 203
  weaving, reference to, v, 106
  wigwam of, described, iii, 70
Navasink. *See* Navesink.
Navesink (Navisinks), meaning of name, iv, 380
  location, vi, 100
Nawagizhi, an Ottowa chief, vi, 386
Nadowissnees [Sioux], meaning of name, vi, 34
Na wee tee (Newittee), a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census, v, 488
  classification, iii, 402
Naw-hu-hu-kaw, opinion of, cited, iv, 231
Nawiti. *See* Na wee tee.
Naw-key-ku-kaw's band, census of, i, 498–507
Nawunena. *See* Ner-mon-sin-nan-see.
Ne ah micco, chief at So woc co lo, iv, 580
Nebraska Territory, data on land of, v, 501
  Indian lands in, iv, 183; v, 486
  Indian population, v, 486
  knowledge of tribes of, i, 198
  population and area, iv, 610
  tribes of, v, 494
Necariages, admitted to Iroquois confederacy, iii, 198–199
  See also Amikwa.
Nechacoke Indians, location of, iii, 570
  population, iii, 570
Necklaces, bead, illustrated, iii, 69
  bear-claw, as amulet, iii, 69
    illustrated, iii, 68
    symbolism of, iii, 69
Ne coon, census of, v, 489
  language, v, 489
  location, v, 489
Ne cul ta, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census, v, 488
Needles, bone, specimens, i, 68
Neeketoos, location, iii, 571
  population, iii, 571
Neerchokioon, a Shahalah tribe, iii, 570
  location, iii, 570
Nees lous, a division of the Sabassas, v, 487
  census, v, 487
Nee-wa-mish (Nee-wam-ish) Indians, language, iv, 600
  location, iv, 598
  population, iv, 598
  See also Dwamish.
Ne-gan-e-ke-shig, biography of, ii, 163–165

Negroes, a cause of trouble, I, 281
  among the Seminoles, VI, 534
  mixture with Indians, I, 287
  part taken in Seminole War, VI, 469, 473
  slaves of Creek towns, IV, 578
  status among the Dacotah, III, 243
  tradition concerning origin, IV, 229
  See also Ethiopian race.
Nehantics, allies of Pequots, VI, 118
  See also Ninantics; Nocanticks.
Ne har mic co, a Cussetaw Town chief, IV, 579
Ne har thlock o, chief at Tol o war thlock o, IV, 580
Ne haw lacco chop-co, of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Neighbors, R. S., I, 229, 260
  Indian population reports by, I, 518; V, 483; VI, 708
  report by, on the Comanches, II, 125–134
  vocabulary by, II, 494; V, 217
Neill, E. D., historical sketch by, V, 646–648
Nelson, Judge, V, 669
Nelyetahneska, chief of the Whistanatin, VI, 702
Nemalquinner, location and population of, III, 570
Nemattanow, treachery and death of, VI, 98–99
Ne-me-te-kah, Chief, band under, V, 201
  meaning of name, V, 201
Nenabozhoo, the creator, V, 418, 419
  See also Manabosho.
Neosho Agency, census, I, 498–507
Neosho Colony, Indians within, IV, 460
Neosho River, De Soto encamped on, VI, 67
Neosho-Senecas, population of, IV, 590
  report on, IV, 590–591
Neosho-Senecas and Shawnees, population of, IV, 590; VI, 687
  report on, IV, 590–591
Neotetains, burial custom, V, 59
Nepersinians. *See* Nipercineans.
Nepicinquis, III, 554
  totems, III, 554
  warriors, number of, III, 554
  See also Nipissins.
Nepisings. *See* Nipissins.
Nepoaset, VI, 108
Neponsetts, affiliations, VI, 150
Ner-mon-sin-nan-see, the southern band of Arapaho, V, 496
Nesqually. *See* Nisqually.
Nets, use in fishing, II, 51, 52, 53
Neu-mon-ga, Iowa chief, characterization, III, 265
Neus River, Indian village on, VI, 86
Neuse River valley, tribe occupying, VI, 182
Neuter Nation; Neuters. *See* Neutral Nation.
Neutral Ground, ceded by Winnebagoes, III, 282
  description of, IV, 236–238
  location of tract called, III, 280
  removal of Winnebago to, III, 281, 282; VI, 488, 497–498, 505
  theory of, VI, 505
Neutral Nation (Neuter Nation, Neuters, account of, IV, 204–208
  bondage, living in, IV, 208
  classification, VI, 137
  description by Breboeuf, IV, 205
  destruction by the Iroquois, III, 289–290
  driven off by Iroquois, III, 196, 291
  Eries at head of, II, 85–86
  forts built by, V, 109
  identification, III, 289, 290; IV, 203, 208
  Iroquois name for, IV, 208
  language, III, 290; IV, 207
  linguistic affinities of, IV, 207
  location, III, 289; IV, 204
  name, VI, 148–149
    French, for the Eries, IV, 198
    Iroquois, IV, 208
    synonyms, IV, 207
  population, IV, 207
  towns, IV, 207
  war against Maskouten, IV, 206
  war on, by Iroquois, V, 137
    by Senecas, VI, 148
  See also Attionandarons.
Ne-u-tub-vig Indians, language, mention of, IV, 600
  location and population, IV, 598
New Brunswick, first settlers in, V, 674, 677
  tribes of, V, 38, 219
    history of, V, 674–680

New Caledonia, cremation practiced in, I, 102
New Dungeness Indians, population of, V, 491; VI, 703
New Echota, dissension over treaty of, VI, 466–467, 474–475, 490, 493, 500, 501, 503, 512–513
New England, ancient names of, VI, 104
  corn of, II, 29
  tribal circles of, VI, 173
  tribes of, V, 38
  white population in 1673, VI, 152
New England tribes, account of, VI, 109–112, 113–127
  condition of, I, 284
  inroads upon, V, 231
  listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
  number of, I, 284
  relations with colonists, VI, 125–126
  wars of, VI, 125–127
New Fire, Aztec, reference to, V, 169
New Fire ceremony, description of, V, 267–268
  suggestive of Toltec origin, IV, 639
Newfoundland, Cabot's landing at, VI, 743
  discovery of, VI, 608
  voyages to, VI, 48
New France, named by Verrazani, VI, 73
New Galicia, mention of, IV, 22, 23
New Hampshire, Indians occupying coast of, VI, 744
  population and area of, IV, 610
  relics from, IV, 175
New Hope Academy, Choctaw education at, IV, 585
New Jersey, population and area, IV, 610
New London, naming of, VI, 124
New Mexico, ancient civilization in, V, 112
  ancient pictographs in, VI, 604
  Indian lands in, IV, 183
  Indian population of, I, 245, 518, 523; V, 484; VI, 687
  inscriptions from, described, IV, 253–254
    illustrated, IV, 253; VI, 69
  land of, V, 501
  map of part of, IV, 24
  population, VI, 709
    and area, IV, 610
New Mexico—Continued
  pueblos, I, 519; III, 633
  tribes, I, 245, 519
New Mexico Indians, VI, 687
  affinities of dialects of, V, 689
  population, I, 245; VI, 687
  report on, II, 555–556
  tribes, described, I, 242–246; IV, 216–221; V, 197, 202
    list of, I, 245, 519
New Netherlands, taken by English, VI, 146
New Orleans, founding of, V, 108; VI, 185, 196
  New River, Indian name for, II, 116
New Yarcau town. *See* New-yau-kau.
New York (1) [State], antiquities of, II, 90–91; IV, 173–174
    illustrated, V, 85
  artesian borings in, I, 162
  census, Indian, first attempted by, V, 481
    of reservations in, VI, 690
  explorations in, VI, 100–102
  geography, physical, I, 176–180
  geology of, I, 163–165
  Indian lands in, III, 583, 586; V, 480
  Indian population of, III, 583, 586, 610; V, 480; VI, 707
  Iroquois population of, VI, 706
  mortuary pottery from, I, 84
  population and area of, IV, 610
  treaties with, made by Iroquois, VI, 324
  tribes of, V, 41; VI, 34, 147
  western, antiquities of, V, 666–674; VI, 609
    history of, V, 666–674
    topography of, I, 163–165
    tribes of, VI, 275
New York (2), a Creek town, V, 262
  origin of name, V, 262
New York Bay, discovery of, VI, 100
  tribes surrounding, VI, 100
New York harbor, first Europeans at, VI, 42
New York Indians, funds required for, II, 566
  lands claimed by, III, 583
  lands of, IV, 572
  population of, IV, 572; VI, 694

New York Indians—Continued
  treaty settling boundary for, VI, 422
  See also under tribal names.
Newberry, William, Chickasaw division of, I, 508
Newichewannocks, location of, V, 223
  members of Pennacook Confederacy, V, 223
  origin of name, V, 223
Newittee. *See* Na wee tee.
Newport, Christopher, expedition commanded by, VI, 96
Newport Ruin, description, IV, 150–152
  fallacy concerning, IV, 117
  illustration of, IV, 121
  theories concerning, IV, 152–155
  true character, IV, 121
Newriver, Gen., rule of, over Ctawbas, III, 295
Newtown Point, treaty made at, V, 668
New-yau-kau (New Yarcau town), VI, 371
  derivation of name, IV, 381
Nez Perce language, publications in, IV, 551
Nez Percés, VI, 688
  burials of, V, 655
  classification, III, 402
  crime among, V, 654
  enemies of Blackfeet, V, 181
  hunting grounds, I, 221
  location, VI, 700
    maps showing, III, 96, 200
  manners and customs, V, 652
  marriage customs, V, 654
  medicine men of, hereditary, V, 652
  names in language of, I, 226
  physical characteristics, V, 656
  population, I, 521; III, 632; V, 705, 706, 707; VI, 688, 700, 701
  See also Chopunnish; Sahaptins.
Niagara, derivation of name, IV, 381–382
  mention of stoneheap at, V, 104
  See also Fort Niagara.
Niagara Indians, represented at Canandaigua council, VI, 326
Niagara River, Indians of, VI, 148
Niagara River Valley, Indians of, V, 144
Niantic. *See* Nehantics; Ninantics; Nocanticks.
Nichols, Col., mention of retreat of, VI, 376
Nicolas, Louis, missionary work of, V, 648
Nicolet, J. J. *See* Nicollet, N. J.
Nicoll, Henry, petition signed by, III, 618
Nicollet, N. J. (Nicolet, J. J.) caves described by, II, 95–99
  ceremony witnessed by, V, 422
  Lake Itasca visited by, I, 148
Nicostratus, reference to, IV, 511
Nicotiana. *See* Tobacco.
Nigh tan, census of, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Nightasis. *See* Nigh tan.
Nim kish, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census of, V, 488
Nimsewi. *See* Nimsus.
Nimsus, location of, VI, 710
Ninantics, controlled by Sassacus, VI, 112
  See also Nehantics; Nocanticks.
Ninegret, VI, 112
  captive Pequots assigned to, VI, 123
Ningwegon, VI, 382
Ninivoan, Ninivois, Ninivona. *See* Minivoa.
Nipegon, derivation of name, III, 524
Nipercineans (Nepersinians, Nipercinians), classification, II, 36; V, 145
  identification, V, 144, 146
  origin and language, V, 144
  origin of name, II, 358
  other names for, V, 41
  territory occupied by, I, 307
  true Algonquins, I, 307
  See also Nipissins.
Nipercinians. *See* Nipercineans.
Nipigon, I, 304
Nipiseing. *See* Nipissins.
Nipissing. *See* Nipissins.
Nipissingo. *See* Nipissins.
Nipissins (Nepisings, Nipiseing, Nipissingo, Nipissiriens), application of name, V, 143
  country occupied by, III, 559
  name, meaning of, V, 40
    synonymy, V, 41
  not an independent tribe, V, 40
  warriors, estimate of, III, 559
  See also Nepicinquis; Nipercineans; O-dish-quag-um-eeg.

Nipissiriens. *See* Nipissins.
Nipmuck(s), affiliations of, VI, 150
  allies of King Philip, VI, 155
  application of name, V, 223
  country inhabited by, V, 218
  derivation of name, V, 223
  hostilities of, VI, 158
Nishcaudjinine, an Ottowa chief, VI, 386
Nishrams, murder by, of medicine-man, V, 653
Niska. *See* Nass Indians.
Nisqualli. *See* Nisqually.
Nisqually (Nesqually) Indians, III, 632
  location, IV, 598
  maps showing location of, III, 96, 200
  population, IV, 598; V, 705
  See also Qualliamish; Skwalz; Squalliamish.
Nisqually River, Indian population of, V, 491
  tribes on, VI, 703
Nitschman, Bishop David, missionary work of, V, 680
Niuna (Niyuna), V, 81; VI, 34, 489, 688
  Comanche name for themselves, V, 576
  synonym of Comanches, V, 483; VI, 686
  See also Comanches.
Niuyaka. *See* New-yau-kau; New York (2).
Niyuna. *See* Niuna.
Noachian epoch, in progress of civilization, II, 45
Noah, Lt., IV, 630
Nocanticks, affiliations of, VI, 150
  See also Nehantics.
No cle pisa hargo, a Creek chief, IV, 576
Nodowaig. *See* Nadowaig.
Nodowáqua, story of, IV, 49
Nodoway, meaning of the word, II, 139
Nod-o-ways. *See* Nadowaig.
Nod-o-way-se-wug, Ojibwa name for Sioux, II, 139
  Ojibwa name for Six Nations, II, 139
Nohannies, an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
  population of, II, 28
Noht-scho, a Klamath River tribe and village, III, 138, 634
Noka (No-ka), V, 184
  biography of, brief, II, 162–163
  Chippewa chief, V, 98, 148
Noka River, alleged origin of name, II, 163
Nokay (No-kay), Chippewa hunter, exploit of, II, 54
  Ojibwa war party led by, II, 155
No-ko-nies, a Comanche division, II, 127
  meaning of the name, II, 127
Nomadic life, effect of, on Indian culture, V, 392–393
Nomadic tribes, country occupied by, VI, 705
  on Upper Missouri, VI, 695
  population of, VI, 705
Nome Cult Valley, Indian population of, VI, 715
  report on conditions at, VI, 717
Nome Lake Reservation, population of, VI, 715
  report on conditions at, VI, 716–717
Nomenclature. *See* Names.
Nonantums, affiliations of, VI, 150
Nonatomenut, petition signed by, V, 237
No-na-um, a Comanche division, II, 128
  meaning of name, II, 128
Nooklummi(e), brief account of, V, 701
  census, V, 704
  See also Lummi.
Nookluolamic, population, VI, 701
  See also Lummi.
Nooksaak, location, V, 704; VI, 703
  population, V, 491, 704; VI, 703
Noosclalum (Nooselalum, Noostlalums), brief account of, VI, 700
  population, I, 521; VI, 701
  See also Clallams.
Noosechatl (Noo-seh-chatl), a Sawamish band, V, 703
Noosechatl, village of, location, V, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 703; VI, 703
Nooselalum. *See* Noosclalum.
Noostlalums. *See* Noosclalum.
Noothum (Noot-hum-mic), language, mention of, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598
  See also Lummi.
Noot-hum-mic. *See* Noothum.
Nootka. *See* Nootka-Columbians.

Nootka-Columbians, color of, II, 321
  head flattening among, II, 325, 326, 328
  territory occupied by, II, 325
  tribes composing, II, 325
Nootkans. *See* Nootka-Columbians.
Nopemings, not an independent tribe, V, 40
  name, origin and meaning of, V, 40, 145
    synonymy, V, 41
  village of, IV, 554
Norridgewock (town), VI, 174
  missionary work at, VI, 174–175
Norridgewocks, an Abenaki division, III, 512
  brief account of, III, 512
  called Abanakis, V, 218
  location, V, 218
North Carolina, Cherokees of, IV, 607
  occupation of, VI, 179
  population and area, IV, 610
  tribes of, V, 42; VI, 31–32, 33, 182
  size, VI, 182
North Yanktons, a Yankton band, II, 169
Northmen, discoveries made by, VI, 742
  visits to America, I, 106
North-west Company, activities, I, 139–140
Northwest Territory, effect of establishment, VI, 348
  Indian lands in, IV, 183
  population and area, IV, 610
Norton, Mohawk chief, work attributed to, IV, 526
Norwalk School, Choctaw, report on, IV, 585
Norwood, Dr. J. G., reference to work of, IV, 190
Nose ornaments, emerald, II, 111
  illustration, III, 69, pl. 14
  of California Indians, III, 141–142
Notched stick, a musical instrument, II, 514
Nott, Josiah, III, 382, 383, 388
  acknowledgment to, III, 376
Nottaways. *See* Nottoways.
Nottowas. *See* Nottoways.
Nottoways (Nottaways, Nottowas), Algonquin name for Iroquois, III, 292
Nottoways—Continued
  amalgamated with Negroes, I, 524, V, 36
  classification, III, 401
  country occupied by, III, 196
  included in Monacan dialects, III, 292
  lands claimed by, III, 583
  location, III, 196, 583
  name, origin of, V, 36
  population, III, 583; VI, 688
  remarks, VI, 688
  remnant, location of, V, 36–37
Nourse, Joseph, letter regarding Indian lands, II, 582–583
  statements furnished by, II, 590
Nova Scotia, discovery, VI, 608
  tribes, V, 38, 219
N'quachamish, location, V, 704; VI, 703
  population, V, 704; VI, 703
  Skagit division, V, 704
N'quutl-ma-mish location, a Sin-a-ho-mish band, V, 704
  population, V, 704
Nsirtshaus, classification, III, 402
  See also Tillamooks.
Nukwatsamish. *See* N'quachamish.
Nu-mal-tachee, a Tuolumne band, IV, 407
Numbers. *See* Numerals.
Numeral system, Comanche, I, 233
  Creek, I, 273
Numerals, Apachee, V, 587–589
  Arapahoes, III, 457–459
  Assiniboine, IV, 429–431, 432
  Caddo, V, 711
  Cheyennes, III, 457–459
  Creek method of recording, I, 273
  Indian discussion of, V, 712
  Mandan, III, 457–459
  Micmac, V, 587
  Mohawk, V, 646
  Navajo, IV, 429–431
  Pueblo (Zuñi), III, 457–459; IV, 429–431
  Tuscarora, V, 646
  Witchita, V, 711
Numerals. *See also* Numeration.
Numeration, Cherokee, II, 209–211
  Chippewa (Ojibwa), II, 216–218
  Choctaw, II, 204–206
  Comanche, II, 129–130
  Cuchan or Yuma, II, 120

Numeration—Continued
  Dacota, II, 178, 206–208
  Hitchittee or Chell-o-kee dialect, II, 220–221
  Indian power of, V, 244
  Ojibwa of Chegoimegon, II, 211–213
  Pillager, II, 213
  Winnebago, II, 214–216; IV, 241
  Wyandot, II, 218–220
  See also Numerals.
Nummi River, Indian population, V, 491
Nundowa, meaning of name, VI, 326
  Seneca name for themselves, VI, 326
Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca. *See* Cabeça de Vaca. (Caba de Vaca).
Nuschtsatl. *See* Noo-seh-chatl.
Nusconcus, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218

O

Oajaca (State) antiquities, VI, 582–583
Oak choy (Oakchoys), a Creek town, IV, 578; V, 262
Oak fuska Town. *See* Oakfuskee.
Oakford, Dr., crania received from, II, 326
Oakfuskee (Oak fuska Town, Ocfuskee), VI, 371
  chiefs, IV, 576
  Creek town, IV, 576; V, 262
Oakfuskies, at Oglethorpe's conference, V, 278
Oakmulgee Creek, early Creek settlement on, V, 98
Oak taw sar seg, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Oath, Dacotah form of, III, 244
Obigwadens, a noted Pillager, V, 189
Oboylaco, Creek chief, friendly to colonists, VI, 296
Obsidian, antiquities, carved, VI, 579, 587–588
  arrowheads, III, 467; V, 114
  knives, I, 92
  occurrence in Snake country, I, 209
Obstetrics among Indians, IV, 515
  See also Childbirth.
Obunegos (O-buh-ne-go), legend concerning V, 192
  location, V, 192
  relations with Michigamies, V, 196
  See also Abnaki.
O-bwah-nug, a synonym for Sioux, V, 193
Ocapa, an Arkansas village, III, 537
Occom, Rev. Mr., activities, IV, 563
  See also Occum, Sampson.
Occoquon Island, colony on, VI, 86
  English arrival, VI, 85
Occum, Sampson, III, 22; biography, V, 518–521
  degeneration in character, V, 521
  Indian emigration under, V, 506
  missionary work, V, 519–520
  portrait of, V, 518
  preaching of, V, 518, 519; VI, 734
  tribes under care of, VI, 324
  See also Occom, Rev. Mr.
Oceanica, pictographic art, I, 429–430
Ocfuskee, derivation of name, IV, 381, 385
  See also Oakfuskee.
Ocheeaupofau, derivation of name, IV, 380
O-chin-chin-nu-kaw's Band, census of, I, 498–507
Ochquaga, mention of stoneheap, I, 179; V, 104
O-chunga-raw, a name of the Winnebagoes, IV, 227
Ockmulgees, conquered by Muscogees, II, 32
Ocmulgee. *See* Oakmulgee Creek; Ockmulgees.
Oconees, II, 344
  conquered by Muscogees, II, 32
Oc te ar che micco, a Creek chief, IV, 576
Ocunnasto, Chief, treachery of, VI, 239
Odagumaig (Odugameeg, Odug-aumeeg), enemies of Chippewas, V, 39
  enemies of Ojibwa, II, 136
  location, II, 141
  Ojibwas harassed by, II, 141
  See also Foxes; Odugameeg.
O-dah-wah. *See* Odawas.
Odawa Lake , origin of name, VI, 202
Odawas (O-dah-wah), a name for the Ottawas, VI, 202
  legend concerning origin, V, 192
  location, VI, 202
  name, meaning of, V, 40
    origin of, V, 145

Odawas—Continued
  not an independent tribe, V, 40
  relations with Michigamies, V, 196
  traders, also called, V, 145
  See also Ottawas.
O-de-eilah tribe, number of villages, III, 171
Odell, William I., survey made by, V, 678
Odenigans, a noted Pillager, V, 189
Odin, Rev. M., V, 699
O-dish-quag-um-eeg, driven west by Six Nations, II, 139
  meaning of name, II, 139
  relations with Ojibwa, II, 139
  See also Nipercineans.
Odjibwa language. *See* Ojibwa language.
Odjibwas. *See* Ojibwas.
Odjibways. *See* Ojibwas.
Odugameeg (Odug-aum-eeg), synonym of Foxes, II, 136; V, 39
  See Odagumaig.
Odug-aum-eeg. *See* Odagumaig.
Oealitk. *See* Onie le toch.
Oetlitk. *See* Weitle toch.
Offerings, deposited upon altars, IV, 126
  in fire ceremony, V, 65–66
  of food to the dead, I, 38–39, 83–84
  See also Sacrifices.
Office, heredity in, I, 194
  See also Chieftainship.
Ofogoula. *See* Affagoula.
Ogakaning, a Chippewa band, I, 458
  census of, I, 458–467
Ogallah. *See* Ogellalas.
Ogden, Capt., vocabulary prepared by, V, 696
Ogden, Gov., V, 663
Ogden, Mr., information from, V, 101
  opinion of, cited, VI, 612
Ogden, Peter Skeine, explorations of, V, 663
Ogechedaw, a noted Pillager warrior, V, 189
Ogechees. *See* Ogeetches.
Ogeechee. *See* Ogeetches.
Ogeelala. *See* Ogellalas.
Ogee-mah kee-ge-to, Chief, treatment of wound of, IV, 513–514
Ogeetches (Ogechees), absorbed by Creeks, VI, 370
  foes of Creeks, V, 98
Ogellahs. *See* Ogellalas.
Ogellalah. *See* Ogellalas.
Ogellalas (Ogallah, Ogeelala, Ogellahs, Ogellalah, Oglala), a Titon division, III, 629; VI, 688
  bands of, III, 629
  census, VI, 556, 713
  country occupied by, III, 629; V, 494; VI, 556, 695
  inscription by, described, IV, 252–253
   illustrated, IV, 251
  leading men, III, 629
  population, I, 523; V, 494; VI, 688, 695
  See also Oglala.
Ogelthorpe. *See* Oglethorpe.
Ogillisa, of Tuck-a-batch-cha Town, IV, 575
Ogima, Ogimaus, use of the terms, I, 194; III, 62
Ogimawish, tale related by, V, 194–195
Oglala, names for, I, 249
  See also Ogellalas.
Oglethorpe (Ogelthorpe) Gen., colony established by, VI, 186
  conference with Indians, V, 278
Ohah-hans-hah, origin of name, II, 171
Ohanhanska. *See* Ohah-hans-hah.
Oh-hah-quah, band under, V, 201
  meaning of name, V, 201
Ohio, admission to Union, VI, 350, 393
  antiquities, V, 660–662, 665–666
  discovery of copper implements, V, 665–666
  early expeditions to, VI, 213
  expansion, VI, 348
  first settlement, VI, 330
  Indian lands, III, 583, 586; V, 480
  Indian population, III, 583, 586; V, 480, 481
  population and area, IV, 610
  tribes of, V, 40
Ohio Indians, VI, 132
Ohio River, derivation and meaning of name, III, 328; IV, 384; V, 133–134; VI, 227
  illustration of view on, VI, 312
  navigation on, III, 340–341
  tribes of, VI, 32, 714
Ohio Valley, census of warriors, IV, 605
  exploration and settlement, VI, 596–597

Ohio Valley—Continued
  French possession, VI, 206, 208
  Indian population, IV, 605–606
  mounds, VI, 610
  remains showing occupancy, V, 41
  struggle for possession of, VI, 212–214, 274, 300
  tribes of, V, 35–36, 37, 41, 140; VI, 210
Oh-nah, a band of Bald Hill Indians, III, 139
Oh-pah, a band of Bald Hill Indians, III, 139
O i Cle la, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, V, 488
  census of, V, 488
Oiyotl, a Klamath River tribe, III, 634
  Klamath River village, III, 138
Ojibwa (Odjibwa) language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341
  grammatical comments, III, 417–419
  letter written in, with translation, V, 601–603
  mother language of the Algonquins, II, 358
  vocabularies, II, 211–213, 216–218, 458–469
    short list of words, V, 39
  words and phrases, III, 412–416
  See also Chippewa language.
Ojibwas (Ojibways, Odjibwas, Odjibways), V, 203
  account of, II, 135–167
  at Braddock's defeat, VI, 218
  battle with Foxes, illustrated, II, 142
  beliefs, II, 135–136; III, 520
  biographies, II, 160–167
  Chippewa name for themselves, V, 41, 142
  classification, III, 401
  eternal fire of, VI, 629
  first contact with Whites, II, 146–147; V, 39
  Grand Traverse Bay, vocabulary, II, 458–469
  history, II, 137–167
  location of bands, II, 137
    of villages, II, 146
  map showing boundaries, II, 137
Ojibwas—Continued
  Michilimackinac, vocabulary, II, 458–469
  migrations, II, 32, 136–137, 139–140
  mission church, V, 698
  missionary work among, V, 699; VI, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740
  Mundau tribe exterminated by, II, 136
  name, derivation of, VI, 483
    meaning of, V, 40
  not an independent tribe, V, 40
  origin, legend of, V, 192–193
  population, II, 139, 140, 151
  reason for location of, II, 141
  relations with French, II, 148
  religious beliefs, II, 135–136
  revenge on Foxes, II, 141, 142
  Saganaw, vocabulary, II, 458–469
  St. Mary's vocabulary, II, 458–469
  territory occupied, I, 307; II, 151
  totems, II, 138
  tribes calling themselves, V, 145
  vocabularies, II, 458–469
  wars, II, 142, 150–160
  wigwams, II, 80
  See also Chippewa.
Ojibways. *See* Ojibwas.
Ojo Caliente, brief description, V, 211–212
Oka. *See* Connefedagoes.
Okafanoka swamp, misplaced on map, V, 256
Okanis, remarks, III, 557
  See also Kansas tribe.
Okechoyatte, name for Muscogees or Creeks, I, 266; II, 32; VI, 333
Oke-fus-ke-yo-ho-lo, a Cussetaw Town chief, IV, 579
Oke-noke, a Trinity River village, III, 139
Okinaganes. *See* Okinagans.
Okinagans (Okinaganes, Okinakanes, Okonagan, Okonagon), location, V, 490; VI, 688
    maps showing, III, 96, 200
  population, III, 632; V, 490, 706, 707; VI, 688, 700
  See also Oukinagans.
Okinakanes. *See* Okinagans.
Okisco, Chief, mention of, VI, 91
Okonagan, Okonagon. *See* Okinagans.
Okreletan, a Rogue River band, VI, 702

Okswago, a name for Lake Erie, iv, 382
Ok-ti-ar-che-e-marth-lar, chief at Oswitchee, iv, 580
Ola walum, explanation of, vi, 176
  name for picture writing, i, 334
  prophecy in, v, 142
Old age and infirmity, Indian attitude, ii, 179, 196; iv, 56, 67, 241; v, 179
"Old fields," Creek council-fire at, vi, 370
Oldham, Col., death of, vi, 336
Oldham, mention of massacre of, vi, 119
Old Owl, a Comanche chief, ii, 128
Old people. *See* Old age and infirmity.
Old Red-shoe, chief of Alabamas and Coosades, v, 263
Old Wing Colony Band, census of, i, 478–487
Old Zuñi, Cibola identified as, iv, 24, 32, 33, 39
  location, iv, 33
  sketch of, iv, 40
  See also Zuñi.
Oleteraca, vi, 74
Olhon. *See* Ol-hones.
Ol-hones, a Dolores Mission tribe, ii, 506
  called Costanos, ii, 506
Olippas, location and population, vi, 710
Ollep-pauh'l-kah-teht'l, a Trinity River village, iii, 139
Olmec monarchy, period of, iii, 515
Olmecs, i, 21
  reference to sun worship, iv, 639
  rule of, i, 21
Ololopa. *See* Holilepas; Olippas.
Olstuaga village, iv, 329
Omahas (Omahaws, Omehas), v, 450
  affiliations, iv, 550
  census, i, 498–507
  classification, iii, 402
  Dacota group, ii, 37
  descendants of Winnebagoes, iii, 278
  encounter with Sioux and Poncas, vi, 693
  fiscal statistics, vi, 721, 723
  funds required, ii, 570
  general condition, iv, 466; vi, 546
  geographical position, i, 498
  indigenous to Kansas, vi, 536
  land ceded by, v, 494
Omahas—Continued
  lands, iv, 573
  linguistic affinities, i, 248
  location, iv, 461; v, 494
    map showing colony, iv, 180
    maps showing, iii, 96; vi, 519
  missionary work among, v, 698; vi, 739
  missions, attendance at, v, 698
  origin, claim concerning, iv, 227
  population, i, 523; iii, 609; iv, 573; v, 494; vi, 688, 693, 705, 706
    decrease in, vi, 706
  reference to territory, iv, 486
  Siouan stock, i, 197
  statement of treaty, v, 497
  territory claimed, vi, 546
    occupied, vi, 705
  whiskey trade, vi, 706
  See also Owaha.
Omahaws. *See* Omahas.
Omamee (Omamees), a synonym of Miamis, v, 41
  enemies of the Ojibwas, ii, 136
  name for Maumes, v, 39
  See also Miamies.
Omamees. *See* Omameeg.
O-man-ee, early enemies of the Ojibwas, ii, 141
  location, ii, 141
  See also Medawakantons.
Omehas. *See* Omahas.
Omens, belief in, iii, 226
  Dacotahs guided by, iii, 228
Onagunga, Iroquois name for Abinaqui, vi, 174
Onantagues, estimates of warriors, iii, 555
  totems, iii, 555
  See also Onondagas.
Onas, Indian name for Thomas Penn, iv, 338
  Iroquois name of Wm. Penn, iii, 197
Onch-pa-pah (Onkpapah), a Titon division, iii, 629
  bands of, iii, 629
  leading men, iii, 629
  location, iii, 629; v, 494
  population, v, 494
Ondaaiondiont, Charles, embassy headed by, vi, 139, 143
Ondaigweos, a leading Chippewa, v, 148

Ondessonk, name for Father Joques, vi, 139
Oneida, derivation of name, i, 176; iv, 384; v, 152, 153
Oneida (town), number of Oneidas at, vi, 706
Oneida Castle, i, 177
    Oneida, name for, iv, 490
    Skenandoah chief at, v, 510
Oneida Creek valley, tribe occupying, vi, 504
Oneida drift stratum, i, 178–179
Oneida Lake, illustration, v, 153
    tribe dwelling on, vi, 714
Oneida language, prayer book, iv, 527–528
    vocabulary, ii, 482–493
Oneida Reservation, census of, vi, 690
    location, vi, 690
Oneida stone, i, 57, 176–180
    description, v, 153
    illustration, i, 177; v, 154
    mistake concerning, v, 153
    removal of, v, 153–154
    See also Oneota stone.
Oneidas, vi, 152, 153
    at Canandaigua convocation, vi, 326
    belief in evil spirits, iii, 483
    census, i, 441–457; iii, 621–628; vi, 718
    characteristics, v, 154
    classification, iii, 401
    colonies aided by, vi, 334
    conference with, v, 667
    cranial measurements, ii, 335
    divisions, i, 441
    general history, v, 152–154
    Green Bay, census of, i, 441–457
        population, vi, 688, 707
    hunting grounds, vi, 714
    Iroquois division, iv, 204
    joined by Stockbridges, iv, 563
    land ceded, vi, 324
    location, i, 441; iii, 583, 590; iv, 463; v, 668; vi, 147, 705, 714
        map showing, iii, 96
    migration, v, 152–153
    missionary work among, v, 698; vi, 734, 735, 737, 739
    New York, census of, v, 504–505
        government, v, 504
        population, vi, 688, 707
    number on reservations, ii, 539, 541
Oneidas—Continued
    one of the Six Nations, iv, 616
    Oneida Castle, census, i, 441–457
    origin myth, vi, 670
    population, i, 441; iii, 583, 590; iv, 603, 604; v, 668; vi, 694, 705, 706, 707, 714
    relations with Whites, v, 154
    religious divisions, v, 506
    removal of, iv, 604
    reputation, v, 512
    reservation described, ii, 541
    Revolutionary War, part in, v, 510, 513, 515; vi, 277, 280, 293, 312, 313
    symbol for, i, 176
    warriors, number of, vi, 616
    Wisconsin, census of, v, 504–505
        government, v, 504
        prosperous condition, v, 506
    See also Oneiders; Oneydoes.
Oneidas and Tuscaroras, land ceded, vi, 324
    location, vi, 275
    population, vi, 275
Oneiders, warriors, iv, 605
Oneota, aboriginal name for stone, i, 176
Oneota stone, i, 169
    See also Oneida stone.
Oneydoes, member of Five Nations, iii, 184
    See also Oneida.
Oneydoes and Toscororas, warriors, iii, 561
Ongue-honwe, Five Nations' name for themselves, iii, 185
Onguiaahra, a town of the Neutral Nation, iv, 207
Ongwi Honwi, a name for the Iroquois, vi, 188
Onie le toch, a Milbank Sound tribe, v, 487
    census, v, 487
Oniouts, French name for Oneidas, v, 154
Onkpapah. *See* Onch-pa-pah.
Onkteri, a class of Dakota gods, iv, 643
    explanation of, vi, 649
    sacrifices to, vi, 649
Onnogontes, number of warriors, iii, 555
    totems, iii, 555

Onondaga country, exploration and settlements, v, 163–164
  search for salt, iii, 98–99
  series of saline strata, iii, 97–99
Onondaga dictionary, depository of, iv, 526
Onondaga language, vocabulary, ii, 482–493
Onondaga (village), capture and burning of, vi, 306
  journey to, from Tulpehocken, iv, 324
  Oneidas at, vi, 706
  Onondagas at, vi, 706
Onondaga Reservation, census of, vi, 690
  location, vi, 690
Onondagas (Onondagoes, Onontagers), an Iroquois division, iv, 204
  at siege of Fort Stanwix, vi, 292
  Cattaraugus, census of, i, 441–457
  census, i, 441–457; v, 504–505; vi, 718
  classification, iii, 401
  conference with, v, 667
  divisions of, i, 441
  dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  dwellings, iv, 340
  government, v, 504
  history, general, v, 155–164
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
  in the Revolutionary War, v, 513; vi, 283, 285
  land ceded by, vi, 324
  life of, on reservation, v, 506
  location, i, 441; iii, 583, 590; v, 668; vi, 147, 275, 705
  member of Five Nations, iii, 184
  missionary work among, vi, 734, 735, 737
  name, derivation and meaning of, iv, 340, 383–384; v, 155, 594
  number on reservations, ii, 539, 540, 541
    of warriors, vi, 261, 270
  one of the Six Nations, iv, 616
  Onondaga, census of, i, 441–457
  population, i, 441; iii, 583, 590; iv, 603, 604; v, 668; vi, 275, 688, 694, 705, 706, 707, 714
  reservation described, ii, 541
  speech to, by Sir William Johnson, vi, 229
Onondagas—Continued
  story of origin of council-fire, iii, 314–317
  treaty with, vi, 324, 334
  village of, iv, 334
  warriors, iv, 605
    estimate of, iii, 561
    number of, vi, 261
  See also Onantagues; Onontago.
Onondagoes. *See* Onondagas.
Onontagers. *See* Onondagas.
Onontago (village), Conrad Wiser at, iv, 338
  council-place of Six Nations, iv, 325
Onosiota, name of the Alleghany chain, vi, 149
Ontagamies. *See* Outagamies.
Ontario, derivation and meaning of name, iii, 328; iv, 382
Ontdwawies, iv, 269, 271
  See also Ottawas.
Ontonagons, dances, iii, 488–491
  dances illustrated, iii, 489
Ontouagannha, a name for Mascoutins, iv, 244
Onundawaga, a synonym for Seneca, iv, 199
Oohenonpa. *See* Kettle Band.
Oojaugenta, Chief, land granted to, vi, 324
Ooktau-hau-zau-see, derivation of name, iv, 380
Ootlashoot, location, iii, 570
  population, iii, 570
Opanangoes, alliance with Menomonie, i, 304
  See also Abnaki.
Opechan, vi, 85.
Opechanganough, vi, 115, 182, 248, 647
  massacre headed by, vi, 98–99, 185, 744
Opegoi. *See* Oppegach band; Oppe-yoh.
Opelousa. *See* Apalousa.
Openango language, vocabulary, v, 690
  See also Abnaki language.
Opilth Mico, a Tallassie chief, v, 263
  opposition to M'Gillivray, v, 281
Opothlahola, Chief, iii, 90
Oppegach band, members of Peh-tsik division, iii, 148
Oppe-yoh, a Quoratem band, iii, 151
Opquire, population, i, 519

- Oquagos, location, v, 668
  - population, v, 668
  - *See also* Aughquagas.
- Oracle, Turtle, belief in, iii, 367
- Oraibi. *See* Oraivaz; Oriva.
- Oraivaz, location, iv, 87
- Oratory, Indian, iii, 56, 191–192, 197–198; iv, 257, 627; v, 247, 518
  - effects, vi, 678
  - style, vi, 661
  - *See also* Speeches.
- Ordeals, for warriors, v, 59–60
- Oregon, antiquities, lack of, v, 662, 663
  - Bonacks in, vi, 35
  - character of land, v, 656
  - derivation of name, v, 123, 708–709
  - first appearance of name, i, 138–139
  - Indian lands, iv, 183
  - population and area, iv, 610
  - route to, i, 223–226
    - posts proposed, i, 225
    - tribes encountered, i, 224
  - *See also* Oregon Indians; Oregon tribes; Oregonians.
- Oregon coast, antiquities, vi, 612–613
- Oregon Indians, customs, v, 651–657
  - embalming by, v, 693
  - handicrafts, iii, 468
  - mental endowments, iv, 49
  - ornaments, illustrated, iii, pl. 14
  - population, i, 436, 437, 523; iii, 632; v, 484; vi, 688, 700
- Oregon Mission, work of, vi, 735
- Oregon trail. *See* Oregon, route to.
- Oregon tribes, i, 192, 198, 521; vi, 700–701, 702, 705
  - country described, iii, 203–205
  - food, v, 80; vi, 625
  - list of, v, 492–493
  - map showing location of, iii, 200
  - missionary work among, vi, 738
  - reply to inquiries concerning, iii, 200–225
  - statistics, v, 492–493, 700–701
  - *See also* Oregonians.
- Oregon and Washington Territories, area and population, v, 501
- Oregonians, brain cavity, ii, 333
  - cranial capacity, v, 244; vi, 574
    - measurements, ii, 335
  - map showing location of, ii, 28
- Orientation, in burials, ii, 69
  - lacking in Dacotah burials, iv, 65
- Origin of Indians, i, 14, 16–18, 343–344; ii, 136; iii, 59–62, 476–477; v, 57–60, 86–87; vi, 568–569
  - antiquity of, i, 14, 16–17; v, 51, 61–62
  - chronological facts bearing on, v, 88
  - customs in relation to, v, 57–70
  - indicated by beliefs, v, 86–87
    - by language, v, 82
    - by manners and customs, i, 40; v, 80, 81–82
    - by sun worship, v, 69
  - Oriental, evidence of, i, 15, 26
  - Shemitic, probability of, i, 15, 26, 40
  - suggestion concerning, iii, 201
  - theory concerning, i, 217
  - *See also* Hebrew origin of Indians; Jewish customs; Origin traditions.
  - *See also* under tribal names.
- Origin of man, various stories, v, 409
- Origin traditions (myths), Ah-mau-dah-kas (Anadarko), v, 682
  - Alabama, i, 266
  - Algonquin, v, 409
  - Apache, vi, 568
  - Athabasca group, i, 61
  - Aztec, i, 19–20
  - Caddo, v, 682
  - California Indians, v, 217
  - Chepewyan, i, 19
  - Cherokee, iv, 136
  - Chickasaw, iv, 136
  - Chippewa, v, 148–149
  - Chippewyans, v, 173
  - Comanche, v, 683
  - Delaware, v, 683
  - Grand Traverse Chippewa, v, 192
  - indicating Toltec migration, iv, 147–148
  - Ionies, v, 682
  - Iroquois, i, 316–317; v, 147, 155–163, 409
  - Kahokia, iv, 135–136
  - Kaskaskia, iv, 135–136
  - Kickapoo, iv, 255
  - Lenno Lenapee, iv, 147
  - Mandan, iii, 247–248
  - Moqui, iv, 86
  - Muscogee, i, 266; iv, 148
  - Nahuatlac, v, 96
  - Navajo, iv, 89, 218–220; vi, 568

Origin traditions—Continued
  Ojibwa, v, 192–193
  Oneida, vi, 670
  Osage, i, 319–320; v, 147
  Ottawa, vi, 202
  Peoria, iv, 135–136
  Piankashaw, iv, 135–136
  point of similarity in, v, 203
  Po-to-yan-te, iv, 224–225
  Pottawatomie, i, 320
  Seneca, iii, 322–323
  Shawano, i, 19
  Shawnee, iv, 147, 255
  Six Nations, v, 632–633
  Toukaways (Tonkawa), v, 683
  Winnebago, iv, 227, 228–231
  See also Migration legends.
Orinoco, meaning of name, iii, 502
Orinoco Indians, color, vi, 573
Oriskany, ambuscade and battle, vi, 287–289
  question concerning battle, iv, 346
Oriva, population, i, 519
Oriwahennic, Chief, tradition related by, v, 75
Ormusd, the principle of good, i, 32
Ornamentation, clothing, ii, 515
  graves, iii 175
  leggins, iii, 66–67
  loincloth, iii, 68
  moccasins, iii, 65, 66
  pottery, iii, 79–81
  sheaths and cases, ii, 515
  See also Costumes; Headdress; Painting.
Ornaments, bracelets, i, 92, 93
  copper, i, 67, 93
  Dacotahs, iv, 69
  from Lake Huron ossuary, illustrated, i, 102–105
  gold, iv, 450
  nose, ii, 111; iii, 69, 141–142
  personal, illustrated, iii, 69
  silver, i, 93
  used as charms, i, 86
  variety, iii, 220
  Winnebagoes, iv, 54, 58
  worn in battle, iv, 54
  See also Ornamentation.
Orondocks and others, dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
Orondocks and others—Continued
  population, vi, 714
  See also Adirondacks.
Orphans, care of, ii, 194; iv, 56, 67
Orr, Hon. James L., speech on bill relating to Indians, v, 451–459
Orr, Mr., amendments to bill introduced by, v, 459
Ortega, Don Jose Maria Martin, ii, 101
Ortez, John (Juan), captivity, vi, 60
  death, vi, 77
  interpreter for De Soto, ii, 34; iii, 37
Ortiz. *See* Ortez.
Oruk, name for Bald Hill Indians (q. v.), iii, 139
Orunges, territory occupied, iii, 554
  warriors, number, iii, 554
  See also Mahicans.
Osage Agency, population, vi, 693
Osage language, brief vocabulary, iv, 275
  publication in, iv, 550
Osage Manual-Labor School, report on, iv, 594–595
Osage Valley, discovery of prehistoric bones, i, 173
Osages, vi, 423, 522
  affiliations, iv, 550
  appropriation for, ii, 564
  bands, iii, 594
  called Bone Indians, iv, 304
  census, vi, 712
  ceremony described, iv, 274–275
  characteristics, iv, 305
  classification, iii, 402
  condition, after removal, vi, 480
    general, iv, 473; vi, 540–541
    report on, iv, 592–595
  country occupied, iii, 559, 577, 585, 594; iv, 274, 461; v, 495; vi, 410, 414, 705
  cranial measurements, ii, 335
  Dacota group, ii, 37
  depredations committed upon, iv, 593
  De Soto in territory of, ii, 35
  divisions, iv, 305
  encampment, arrangement of, iv, 304
  farming operations, vi, 712
  food, reference to, i, 41
  French relations, vi, 237

Osages—Continued
- funds required, II, 571
- government, VI, 541
- hostility to settlers, IV, 298–299, 300
- indigenous to Kansas, V, 495; VI, 536
- intrusion on territory, IV, 485
- investments for, II, 563
- lands, IV, 572
  - claimed, III, 585
  - conveyed by, V, 451
- linguistic affinities, I, 248
- lodges described, IV, 304
- map showing colony of, IV, 180
- maps showing location, III, 96; VI, 519
- missionary work among, V, 699; VI, 738
- mortality among, IV, 592–593, 595
- mourning customs, V, 685
- name of, native, VI, 688
  - origin of, IV, 304, 592; VI, 206
- origin myth, I, 319–320; V, 147
- Pawnees attacked, IV, 593
- population, III, 585, 594, 609; IV, 572; V, 495; VI, 414, 540, 688, 705
- Siouan stock, I, 197
- statistics, fiscal, VI, 720, 721, 722, 723
  - on land, II, 605
  - vital, IV, 595
- treaty made, VI, 380, 461
- victory over, by Iowas, III, 264
- warriors, estimate of, III, 557, 559
- war with Chickasaws, I, 311
- *See also* Great and Little Osage; Wasbashas.

Osagwatha, VI, 98

Osawkees, a name for the Sacs (q. v.), V, 41

Osborne, W., report on Iroquois population, IV, 603

Osceola, VI, 647
- activities in Seminole War, VI, 470, 471

Oscooche, a Creek band, III, 511

O-se-lar-ne-by, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578

Oshah-wah-noes, reference to name, V, 192

Oshah-wa-nög, reference to name, V, 192

Oshawano, a synonym of Shawnee, V, 41

Oshcabawiss, Chief, delegation headed, I, 415, 417

Oshkinawens, a noted Pillager, V, 189

Oskemanitigous, totem, III, 556
- warriors, number, III, 556

O sooch e micco, of Tuck-a-batch-cha Town, IV, 575

Osse-gon, name for Indians of Gold Bluff, III, 133

Ossipees, derivation of name, V, 222
- members of Pennacook Confederacy, V, 222

Ossuaries, VI, 618
- age of, I, 103
- ancient Algonquin, I, 102
- at Beverly, in Canada, West, IV, 561
- attributed to Assigunaigs, I, 307
- attributed to Mushkodains, I, 307
- conclusions drawn from, I, 104
- description, I, 102–105
- origin, I, 102
- pipes found in, I, 75
- place in sequence of burial customs, I, 102
- Pueblos, IV, 78
- Upper Lakes, I, 68–69
- *See also* Charnel houses; Tomb.

Osteninky (village), IV, 334, 340, 341

Osteology, antique, monster period, I, 173–175

Oswegatches (Oswegachys), dwelling grounds, VI, 714
- hunting grounds, VI, 714
- population, VI, 714
- warriors, number, VI, 270
- *See also* Swegachi.

Oswego, etymology of name, V, 594
- tribes dwelling at, VI, 714

O-switch-ee, a Lower Creek town, IV, 578, 580

O-switch-ee e-marth-lar, chief at Oswitchee, IV, 580

Oteetoocheenas, a Creek town, V, 262

Othomi Indians, population, III, 517–518

Oto (Otoe) language, publication in, IV, 550

Otoes, V, 450
- affiliations, IV, 550
- attacked by Sioux, V, 650–651
- census, I, 498–507
- claim concerning origin, IV, 227
- cranial measurements, II, 335

Otoes—Continued
  descendants of Winnebagoes, III, 278
  funds required, II, 570
  headdress illustrated, III, 68
  horses sacrificed, V, 78
  in the Dacota group, II, 37
  indigenous to Kansas, VI, 536
  lands surrendered, V, 494; VI, 456
  location, I, 498; IV, 461; V, 494
  map, showing colony, IV, 180
    showing location, III, 96; VI, 519
  missionary work among, V, 698; VI, 739
  population, I, 523; V, 494; VI, 688
  reference to territory, IV, 486
  shape of skulls, II, 317
  Siouan stock, I, 197
  See also Ottoes.
Otoes and Omahas, attendance at missions, V, 698
Otomie, cranial measurements, II, 335
O-ton-kah, Sioux name for Winnebagoes, IV, 227
Otsego, derivation of name, IV, 384
Otsiningo (village), on site of Binghampton, N. Y., VI, 132
Ottagamies. *See* Outagamies.
Ottawa (Ottowa) language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341
  list of works in, IV, 538–539
Ottawany, Chief, VI, 255
Ottawas (Ottowas), III, 277, 278, 554; VI, 237, 375, 481
  annuities paid to, II, 586, 588; IV, 188; VI, 723
  appropriation for, II, 564
  armistice granted to, VI, 364
  at Braddock's defeat, VI, 217, 218
  at treaty with Bradstreet, VI, 255
  attitude in Revolutionary War, VI, 278
  average size, IV, 349
  canoe illustrated, V, 95
  census, I, 478–487; III, 621–628
  classification, III, 96, 401
  condition, general, IV, 467, 468
    report on, VI, 547
  council attended, VI, 393
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  crops raised, V, 708
  dialect, distinct, II, 358
  divisions, I, 478; III, 554
Ottawas—Continued
  dwelling grounds, VI, 714
  funds required, II, 570–571
  Grand River Valley, census of, I, 478–487
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  industry, V, 708
  investments for, II, 561, 562, 563
  islands occupied, VI, 202
  lands ceded by, II, 602, 603, 604; IV, 188; VI, 393–395, 458, 464, 505
    claimed, III, 583, 584
    permanently granted to, V, 457
    purchased from, II, 593, 595, 598, 599, 600, 601
    statistics on, II, 605, 606
    surveyed for, IV, 572
  language, reference to, III, 96
  L'Arbre Croche, census of, I, 478–487
  league with other tribes, VI, 485
  led by Pontiac, II, 242
  location, I, 306, 478; III, 541, 559, 583, 584, 591; IV, 187, 461; V, 495; VI, 33, 202, 275, 385, 705, 714
    maps showing, III, 96; IV, 180; VI, 519
  Maumee, condition of, VI, 517
  migrations, I, 59; II, 139; VI, 488, 734
  mission church, V, 698
  missionary work among, VI, 735, 738, 739
  origin tradition, VI, 202
  Osage, census of, I, 478–487
  other names for, I, 306; V, 41; VI, 202
  part taken in siege of Detroit, II, 242, 243, 248, 249, 255, 273, 279, 281, 284, 296, 298, 300, 301, 307
  payments made to, VI, 721, 723
  peace sought, VI, 343
  picture writing, I, 338
  Pontiac joined by, VI, 243
  population, I, 478, 523; III, 581, 583, 584, 591, 609, 610; IV, 572; V, 495, 708; VI, 271, 272, 275, 688, 693, 705, 714, 721
  removal, V, 495; VI, 505–506, 516
  resemblance to Chippewas, IV, 187; VI, 464
  separation from Ojibwas, II, 139
  statistics, fiscal, VI, 721, 722, 723
  superiority in navigation, V, 395

Ottawas—Continued
  totems, III, 554
  treaties, v, 499; vi, 327, 330, 334, 380, 421
    ceding lands, vi, 458
  warriors, estimate of, III, 559
    number of, III, 554; vi, 271, 275
  See also Atawas; Odawas; Ontdwawies; Ottawas and Chippewas; Tawas; Utawawas.
Ottawas and Chippewas (Chepawas), attendance at missions, v, 698
  bands, list of, III, 615–616
  chiefs, names of, III, 615–616
  dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
  missions, attendance at, v, 698
  population, III, 610; vi, 692, 714
  statistics, III, 615–616; vi, 720, 722, 723
  trading posts, III, 599–600
Ot-teh-petl, a band of Bald Hill Indians, III, 139
Otter-Tail Lake, Indians, v, 185
Ottigamie. *See* Outagamies.
Ottinger, Capt., at Humboldt Bay, III, 131
Ottisse, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Ottoes, classification, III, 402
  condition of, IV, 466; vi, 544–546
  country occupied, III, 593
  lands of, IV, 573
    ceded, II, 603
    claimed, vi, 546
    purchased from, II, 600
    statistics on, II, 605
  population, III, 593; IV, 573; vi, 693
  See also Otoes.
Ottoes and Missourias, country occupied, vi, 705
  population, III, 609; vi, 705, 706
  treaty, v, 497
Ottowa Colony Band, census of, I, 478–487
Ottowa language. *See* Ottawa language.
Ottowas. *See* Ottawas.
Ouachtenons, country occupied, III, 559
  warriors, estimate of, III, 555, 559
  See also Weas
Ouade, vi, 74
Ouali, totem, III, 556
  warriors, number of, III, 556
Ouanakina, III, 559
  warriors, estimate of, III, 557, 559
Ouaroronon, mention of town, IV, 205
Oubenakis, a synonym of Abnakis (q. v.), III, 553
Oufotu, an Arkansas village, III, 537
Ougatanous, totems, III, 555
  warriors, number of, III, 555
  See also Weas.
Ouiatanos, estimate of warriors, III, 554
  See also Weas.
Ouiattonon, Miami town, attack on, vi, 335
Ouillequegaws, map showing location, III, 96
  See also Quilleoueoquas.
Ouisconsins, country occupied, III, 559
  warriors, estimate of, III, 559
    number of, III, 554
Ouitimaus, estimate of warriors, III, 555
  See also Wea.
Oukinagans (Oukinegans), population, I, 521; vi, 702
  See also Okinagans.
Ounepigous, III, 556
  totem, III, 556
  warriors, number of, III, 556
  See also Winnebago.
Ounikanes, totem, III, 554
  See also Amikwa.
Ounontisaston, a town of the Neutral Nation, IV, 205
Outagamies (Ontagamies, Ottagamies, Ottigamie, Outagamis), brief history, vi, 193–194
  cranial capacity, v, 244
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  driven from Pillager territory, v, 184
  language, vi, 193
  name for Fox Indians, IV, 245; v, 524–525; vi, 271
  warriors, estimate of, III, 555
  See also Foxes; Outtagomies and others.
Outagamis. *See* Outagamies.
Outeonas, totems, III, 554
  warriors, number of, III, 554
Outina, vi, 74

Outtagomies and others, dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
  population, vi, 714
Outtamacks and others, dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
  population, vi, 714
Ovando, iii, 23
Owaha, country occupied, iii, 594
  population, iii, 594
  See also Omahas.
Owassa, revenge of, ii, 294
Owasson, Chief, at Pontiac's camp, ii, 278–279, 281
Owayneo, a benevolent spirit, iv, 637
Owen, David Dale, reference to work, i, 52
Owen, Mr., reports made by, iv, 189
Owen, R. D., ii, 176
Owens, Col., death of, vi, 355
Owenungas, Iroquois name for Abenakis, (q. v.), iii, 513
Owiligascho, name of Peter Spelman, vi, 132
Owis-gera, iv, 325
Oyateshicha. *See* Good Road band.
Ozark Mountains, crossed by De Soto, vi, 67
Ozark region, description, iv, 280–286, 309
  De Soto in, iii, 48, 50
Ozawikinebik, a Pillager chief, v, 189
Ozawundib, Chief, i, 145, 146
Ozimies, location, vi, 131
Ozinies. *See* Ozimies.

P

Pabaksa. *See* Pah-bax-ahs.
Pablo, Yuma chief, meeting with, ii, 112
Pachacamac cemetery, skulls discussed, ii, 329
Pacific coast tribes, census of, v, 487–489
  changes in customs, vi, 623–624
  divisions, i, 436–437
  list, v, 487–489
Paconekick, mentioned by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Pacquette, Pierre, assassination, iii, 281
Padducas. *See* Padoucah.
Padoucah (Padducas, Padoucas), country occupied, iii, 559, 596
  population, iii, 596, 609
  tribes, iii, 596
  warriors, estimate of, iii, 557, 559
  See also Comanches.
Padoucas. *See* Padoucah.
Paegans (Pagans), vi, 686
  classification, iii, 402
  See also Piegan.
Page, James, iii, 383
Pa-ha-sca's band, reference to, vi, 540
Pahatsi. *See* Grandes Eaux; Great Osages.
Pa-ha-yu-ca, a Comanche chief, ii, 128
Pah-a-yu-ka's band, number of, iii, 635
Pah-bax-ahs, a Yankton band, ii, 169
  territory occupied, ii, 169
Pah-lo-cho-ko-lo, a Lower Creek town, iv, 578
Pahmetes, a division of the Utahs, vi, 697
  See also Pah-Utahs; Payoches.
Pa-hu-chas, Iowa name for themselves, iii, 262
Pah-Utahs, map showing location, iii, 96
  See also Pahmetes; Payoches.
Pahvant. *See* Parant Utahs.
Pailsh tribe, location, iii, 571
  population, iii, 571
Paine, Brinton, v, 668
Paine, James M., report on Cherokee schools, iv, 588
Paint bags, illustrations, iii, 65
Paint Creek, mention of earthworks, vi, 597
Paint Town, census of, i, 508–517
Painted Post, description, v, 670
  treaty of, v, 668
Painting, face and body, ii, 113, 114; iv, 53, 63, 79, 649; v, 211
Paintings, ancient Mexican, value, iv, 453–454
Paiute. *See* Pahmetes; Pah-Utahs; Payoches.
Palace of Montezuma. *See* Casa Grande.
Palachuola, a lower Creek town, v, 262
Palaiks, classification, iii, 402
  map showing locations, iii, 96
Palenque monuments, conclusions drawn from, iv, 114

Palenque ruins, discussion of period of, v, 106
Palladic or Oneota stone, reference to, I, 109
Palladium of the Oneidas, I, 176
Palmer, Mr., report on the Umpquas, VI, 624
Palmer's Island, erection of fort, VI, 143
Paloos (Palooses), map showing location, III, 200
  population, III, 632; VI, 701
  See also Palvas; Pelloatpallah; Pelouse.
Paluxies, synonym of Bolixes (q. v.), v, 702
Palvas, population, I, 521
  See also Paloos.
Pamlico. *See* Pamticos; Pemblicos.
Pamlico language. *See* Pampticough language.
Pamlico Sound, Indians of, VI, 31
Pampticough language, an Algonquin dialect, III, 406
  short list of words, v, 38
  vocabulary, v, 555–556, 556–557
Pamticos (Pamticoes), classification, III, 401; v, 38
  southern limit of Algonquins, v, 42
  See also Pemblicos.
Pamunkies, brief account of, v, 36
Pamunky River, Indians on, v, 36
Panaoumski village, mention of, III, 553
Pancoast, Prof., III, 382
Pandouca stock, tribes, III, 596
  See also Comanches.
Pani (Panies), III, 557
  a name for the Pawnee, III, 50
Pani-Mahaws, III, 399
Pani, Towiacks, listed as a linguistic family, III, 402
Panis Blancs, country occupied, III, 559
  warriors, estimate of, III, 557, 559
  See also Pawnees.
Panis Piques, country occupied, III, 559
  warriors, estimate of, III, 557, 559
  See also Pawnee Piques.
Pan-nacks, a synonym of Bonnacks (q. v.), III, 200
Panton Leslie & Co., v, 275
Papanhank, address by, v, 138
Papinachaux, totem, III, 556
  warriors, number of, III, 556
Papisseconewa. *See* Passaconnaway.
Papukewis, power of, I, 82
Paracelsus, reference to, IV, 511
Paradise, Indian conception of, v, 403
Paralysis, belief concerning, I, 255
  ignorance regarding, IV, 515
Parant Utahs, a division of the Utahs, VI, 697
  population, VI, 697
Par-hose-e-marth-lar, chief at Sowoccolo, IV, 580
Par-kee-na-um, a Comanche division, II, 128
  meaning of name, II, 128
Parker, Wm. B., Texas Indians described by, v, 682–685
Park Hill, Presbyterian station at, IV, 589
Parry, C. C., vocabulary collected by, III, 460
Parry, Dr., II, 102, 109
Parsons, Benjamin, Creek census taken by, IV, 575
Parted Teeth. *See* Katawabata.
Par-too-ku, Osage name for Comanches, II, 126
Parturition. *See* Childbirth.
Parus River tribes, skulls preserved by, IV, 489–490
Pascagoula, country occupied, III, 596
  location, III, 585
  population, III, 585, 596
Pascagoula River, Indians on, VI, 32
Pas coaf emathlar, of Hemawhie Town, IV, 576
Pasharanack, mentioned by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Pasqual, a minor Cuchan chief, II, 112
Passaconnaway, v, 222
  account of, v, 227–237
  brief description of, VI, 174
  character of, v, 237
  children, v, 236–237
  death of, v, 237
  farewell speech, v, 234–235
  great age of, v, 229
  name, meaning of, v, 227
  petition to legislature, v, 235–236
  sagamore, leading Pennacook, v, 223, 228
    New England, v, 218
  tribute paid to, v, 228

Passamaquoddies, country occupied, v, 219
  land claimed, III, 583
  location, III, 583
  missionary work among, VI, 737
  population, I, 524; III, 583; VI, 688
Passamaquoddy language, vocabulary, v, 689–690
Passataquak, listed by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Passemonte, Michael, IV, 451
Pastoral stage, importance, II, 519–521
Patagonians, stature of, II, 318
Patent Office, U. S., museum specimens in, IV, 660
Pathology, Indian knowledge of, IV, 507–508
Paticas (Patticas), absorbed by Creeks, VI, 370
  era of, v, 133
  foes of Creeks, v, 98
Patofa, war-chief, De Soto joined by, III, 40
Patriarchal system, in various tribes, III, 62
  Indian attitude toward, v, 43–44
Pattawatimas. *See* Potawatomies.
Patterson, Mr., of Union, III, 145
  superintendent of Indian school, IV, 592
Patticas. *See* Paticas.
Patuxent River, Indians on, VI, 134, 138
Patuxents, missionary work among, VI, 734, 735
Pauguk, a mythological character, v, 149, 409
Pauhuntanuck, listed by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Paunaques, a synonym for Bonacks (q. v.), I, 206
Paunch (Ponch) Indians, identified as Minnetarees, III, 251
  story of origin, III, 251
  See also Allakaweah.
Pauskooziegun, an Ottowa chief, VI, 386
Pauteauamis, remarks, III, 556.
  totems, III, 556
  warriors, III, 556
  See also Potawatomies.
Paviotso. *See* Pi-Utahs.
Pawactas, a Creek town, v, 262
Pawateeg, Chippewa name for Sault Ste. Marie, IV, 557
Pawcatuck River, Indians on, VI, 110
Pawkees, III, 252
  territory occupied, III, 252
  See also Siksika.
Pawmet, mentioned by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Pawnee Loups, a Pawnee band, III, 595
  location, III, 595
Pawnee Piques, a Pawnee band, location, III, 595
  population, III, 595
  See also Panis Piques.
Pawnee Republicans, a Pawnee band, location, III, 595
Pawnees, IV, 450
  attacks on, IV, 466, 593
  condition after removal, VI, 547
  country occupied, III, 595; IV, 486; v, 495; VI, 688, 705
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  Dacota group, II, 37
  four great bands, III, 595
  funds required, II, 572
  human sacrifice among, IV, 50; v, 77–78; VI, 495
  identical with Quipana, IV, 310
  indigenous to Kansas, v, 495; VI, 536
  intermarriage with Comanches, II, 126
  lands, IV, 573
    ceded by, II, 603; VI, 459
    granted to permanently, v, 457
    purchased from, II, 600
    statistics on, II, 606
  listed as a linguistic family, III, 402
  maps showing location of, III, 96; IV, 180; VI, 519
  missionary work among, VI, 738
  other names for, III, 529; VI, 495
  population, I, 523; III, 479–480, 595, 609; IV, 573; v, 495; VI, 688, 693, 705
  range of war parties, I, 159
  reputed builders of earthworks, III, 274
  use of arrow, I, 77
  visited by De Soto, III, 50
  See also Pani; Panis Blancs; Quipana.
Paw-sed-ech-kaw's Band, census of, I, 498–507
Pawtucket Falls, Pennacooks at, v, 230

Pawtucket(s), VI, 108
    affiliations, VI, 150
    name for the Wamesit, V, 221
        origin and application, V, 221
    See also Wamesits.
Paxinosa, Shawnees represented by, at council, VI, 132
Payne's Landing, treaty of, VI, 471–472
Payoches, brief account of, IV, 82–83
    See also Pahmetes; Pah-Utahs.
Pea Creek band, attitude in Seminole War, VI, 469
Peabody, Samuel, settlers led by, V, 675
Peace, symbolic house of, IV, 199
Peace dance, description, III, 173
Peace pipe, description, II, 512; III, 306
    illustration, II, 512; III, 306
    use, III, 268
    See also Calumet.
Peace towns, purpose of, III, 531
Peag. *See* Wampum.
Peanquichas, III, 555
    country occupied, III, 559
    totems, III, 555
    warriors, number of, III, 555, 559
    See also Piankashaws.
Peatan, Chief, mention of, II, 260
Pecaneaux, a tribe of the Blackfeet group, V, 179
    See also Piegans.
Pecas, ruins described, IV, 40
    See also Pecos.
Peck, Rev. J. M., cited, IV, 129
Peck, S., missionary report by, V, 698
Pecos, V, 107
    abandonment of, V, 689
    attacks by Comanches, IV, 35
    identified as Cicuyé, IV, 32, 35, 39
    language, V, 689
    situation, IV, 36
    sketch of, IV, 29
    See also Pecas.
Pecos Valley, ancient habitations in, V, 112
Pec-quan, a Klamath River tribe and village, III, 138, 634
Pedadumies, relations with Michigamies, V, 196
    See also Potawatomies.
Pedees, reference to, II, 344
Pedoriva, Don Miguel de, II, 101
Peeká-gamah Falls, description, III, 365
    meaning of name, III, 365
Peh-tsik, application of name, III, 138, 151, 422
Peigans. *See* Piegans.
Peirria, Albert de, colony under command of, VI, 73, 74
Pejodque Pueblo, population, VI, 688
    See also Pojoaque.
Pekwan. *See* Pec-quan.
Pelloatpallah band, location, III, 570
    population, III, 570
    See also Paloos.
Pelouse population, V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 700
    position of, V, 490
    See also Paloos.
Pembina, buffalo hunting on plains of, IV, 94–110
    missionary station at, V, 699
Pemblicos, smallpox among, VI, 181
    See also Pamticos.
Pemegewasset River, meaning of name, V, 226
    salmon in, V, 226
Pemican, process of making, IV, 107; V, 175
Pemmaquid, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Pemmican. *See* Pemican.
Penasco, Count, mention of collection, VI, 578
Penateka. *See* Ho-is.
Pend d'Oreilles (Pond Orrilles), V, 490
    enemies of the Blackfeet, V, 181
    population, III, 632; V, 490, 706
    position of, V, 490
    punishment among, V, 654
    See also Kalispel; Pend d'Oreilles, Lower; Pend d'Oreilles, Upper.
Pend d'Oreilles (Pond Orrilles), Lower, maps showing location, III, 96, 200
    population, III, 632; V, 705, 707; VI, 700
Pend d'Oreilles (Pond Orrilles) Upper, maps showing location, III, 96, 200
    population, III, 632; V, 705, 707; VI, 700
Penishon, Mendewakanton village at, II, 97

Penn, Thomas, policy of, IV, 617
  proprietor of Pennsylvania, IV, 339
  purchase of Indian lands, IV, 324
Penn, William, III, 197
  doctrine taught, V, 138
  founding of Philadelphia, VI, 185
  Indian name of, IV, 256
  relations with the Indians, VI, 178
Pennacook bashabary, composition, VI, 173
  extent, VI, 115
Pennacook village, Indian fort at, V, 230
Pennacooks, III, 513; VI, 156
  allies of Pokanokets, VI, 114
  application of name, V, 223
  arts, state of, IV, 175
  country occupied, V, 217, 222, 230; VI, 115, 125
  derivation of name, V, 222
  driven out by English, VI, 174
  history, general, V, 217–237
  implements illustrated, IV, 175
  in valley of Connecticut River, V, 226
  population, V, 230
  possible origin, V, 229
  standing among other tribes, V, 222
  tribes controlled, V, 222–223
  villages, V, 230
Pennobscot, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
  See also Penobscots.
Penn's Cove Indians, population, V, 705
Pennsylvania, population and area, IV, 610
Penobscots, a division of the Abenakis, III, 512
  land claimed, III, 583
  location, III, 583
  missionary work among, VI, 737
  population, I, 524; III, 512, 583; VI, 688
Penointik-ara (Penoi-in-tickara, Penoitikara), classified as Comanche, VI, 688
  meaning of name, I, 260
  population, I, 522
Pensacola, battle of, VI, 376, 403
Pentland, Mr., opinion on Aymaras, II, 328
  opinion on Peruvian skulls, II, 326
Peonies, country occupied, III, 592
  population, III, 592
  See also Peorias.
People of the Lakes, language spoken, III, 562
  leading men, III, 568
  population, III, 562
  synonyms, III, 562
  trade, III, 564
  trading post, III, 566
  tribal relations, III, 566
  villages, number, III, 562
  warriors, number, III, 562
  See also Medawakanton.
People of the Leaves, language spoken, III, 563
  leading men, III, 569
  population, III, 563
  synonyms of, III, 563
  trade, III, 565
  trading post, III, 567
  tribal relations, IIII, 567
  warriors, number, III, 563
  See also Wahpeton.
People of the Leaves, detached, III, 563
  language spoken, III, 563
  leading men, III, 569
  population, III, 563
  synonyms for, III, 563
  trade, III, 565
  trading post, III, 567
  tribal relations, III, 567
  See also Wahpekute.
Peores. *See* Peorias.
Peoria, trading post, VI, 269
Peoria language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341
Peorias (Peores), VI, 481
  also called Illinese, V, 41
  annuities, II, 588
  census, III, 621–628
  classification, V, 145
  condition of, general, IV, 467, 468
  creation myth, IV, 135–136
  descendants of Illinese, I, 59; V, 192
  descendants of mound-builders, IV, 135
  friendly to the French, VI, 237

- Peorias—Continued
  - lands, iv, 572
    - ceded, ii, 603
    - disposal of, 496
    - granted to, permanently, v, 457
    - purchased from, ii, 595, 598, 600
    - statistics on, ii, 605, 606
  - location, iv, 461
    - map showing, vi, 519
  - march against, vi, 360
  - missionary work among, vi, 734, 735, 739
  - name, origin of, iv, 380
  - population, i, 523; iv, 572; vi, 688
  - removal, vi, 516, 536
    - agreed to, vi, 445
  - totems, iii, 555
  - treaty with, v, 496–497, 499
  - warriors, estimate of, iii, 555
  - *See also* Peonies; Peorias and Kaskaskias; Pianria; Piantias.
- Peorias and Kaskaskias, census of, i, 488–497
  - location, i, 488; v, 495
  - map showing colony, iv, 180
  - origin, v, 495
  - population, iii, 609, 610; v, 495; vi, 693
  - removal, v, 495
  - *See also* Peorias and others.
- Peorias (Piorias) and others, dwelling grounds, vi, 714
  - fiscal statistics, vi, 721, 723
  - hunting grounds, vi, 714
  - location, vi, 705
  - population, vi, 705, 714
  - *See also* Peorias and Kaskaskias.
- Pepht-soh, a Trinity River village, iii, 139
- Pepikokia. *See* Pettikokias.
- Pequaquaukes, derivation of name, v, 222
  - members of Pennacook Confederacy, v, 222
- Pequatoas, a name for the Pequots (q. v.) vi, 116
- Pequawket. *See* Pequaquaukes.
- Pequot-Algonquins, tribal circle, vi, 173
- Pequot River, Indians on, vi, 110
  - now the Thames, vi, 117, 126
- Pequot War, account, vi, 110–112
  - history, vi, 116–124
  - reference to, vi, 173
- Pequots, also called Brothertons, v, 41; vi, 113, 114, 125
  - derivation and meaning of name, v, 38; vi, 116
  - end as a tribe, vi, 123
  - extent of territory, vi, 110
  - history, vi, 116–120
  - language, vi, 111
  - massacred by English, vi, 119
  - population, vi, 117
  - reference to, vi, 115
  - territory held, v, 218; vi, 116
- Perforated stones, discussion, i, 170
- Perkins, reference to metallic tractors of, iv, 511
- Perley, G. H., history of New Brunswick Indians, v, 674–680
- Perley, Israel, settlers led by, v, 675
- Perrault, John Baptiste, brief biography, iii, 352
  - writings of, translated by Schoolcraft, iii, 353–369
- Perrie, Mr., mention of, iii, 383
- Perry, effect of victory, vi, 363
- Perry, Dr., mention of, ii, 108
- Perryman, Ellen, measurements of hair, iii, 384
- Pershe-go, at Shoshone peace council, iv, 596
- Persian tablet, illustration, i, 423
- Peru, antiquities, v, 657
  - cause of rebellion, iii, 23
  - civilization, v, 29
  - foreign dynastic element, iv, 123
  - references to early government, iii, 181, 182, 183
  - weaving, v, 106
- Peruvian antiquities, described by Ulloa, v, 90–92
- Peruvians, art as prototype for northern tribes, v, 391
  - burial customs, v, 81
  - comparative civilization, v, 291
  - cranial capacity, vi, 574–575
  - customs, reference to, v, 394
  - development, v, 392
  - discussion of Peruvian race, v, 94
  - distinct from other aborigines, v, 290–291

Peruvians—Continued
  head deformation discussed, II, 326–328
  size of brain, II, 329, 330
  worship, reference to, V, 69
Peshkewah, biography, V, 527–530
Pestilence, among New England coast tribes, V, 219
Pestles, stone, described, I, 80
  illustrated, I, 84; IV, 175
  See also Mortar and pestle.
Peter, Jafer, witness at signing of treaty, VI, 144
Peters, Dr. Absalom, IV, 119
Petersen, Rev. Edward, IV, 121
Petition to the President, pictographs used, I, 414–420
Petroglyphs, where found, I, 334
  See also Inscriptions; Sculptured Rock.
Petroleum, cures effected by, I, 161
  Chickasaw lands, I, 161
  Seneca Reservation, I, 161
Petti-coat, a Shoshoni chief, V, 199
Pettikokias, III, 555
  totems, III, 555
  warriors, number, III, 555
Pettiquanscott, destruction of, VI, 162
Petun or Tobacco Indians, slaughter of, IV, 203
  totems, IV, 204
  See also Tionontates.
Pezhikee, Chief, VI, 385
Phallic worship, supposed indications of, IV, 140
Pheasant, a Blackfeet leader, V, 180
Phelps, S. L., IV, 438
Phelps and Gorham, complaint against, V, 667
  land purchased by, V, 667
Philadelphia, founding of, VI, 185
  on site of Delaware village, IV, 280
Philip, King. *See* King Philip.
Philip of Pokanoket. *See* King Philip.
Phillips, John, IV, 351
Phillips, J. S., paper on cranial measurements, II, 331
Phillips, Mr. (artist), portrait of Blacksnake, V, 673
Phillips, Mr. (craniologist), skulls examined, V, 287
Philology, discussion of, IV, 666–667
Phlegmon, Indian remedy for, IV, 514
Phoenician element, suggestion in Indian culture, V, 86
Phoenician inscription, compared with that from Grave Creek mound, VI, 611
Phoenicians, in Africa, V, 88
Phonetic key to vocabularies, IV, 432
Physical characteristics, I, 40–41; II, 316–335; III, 373–393
  affected by food, II, 32; V, 656
  Algonquin, compared with Mexican, V, 107
  conclusions drawn from, IV, 351, 354–355
  Creeks, V, 274
  described by Morton, II, 38, 315
  Iroquois, compared with Mexican, V, 107
  Mandans, III, 250
  Oregon and California Indians, III, 223, 224
  origin theory based on, I, 40
  permanency, I, 15, 41
  similarity among tribes, II, 316, 323; V, 31–32, 56
  See also Physical types.
Physical geography, Indian country, III, 91–177; IV, 179–194
  Southern California, II, 100–118
Physical strength, Indian, compared with white man's, III, 246
Physical traits. *See* Physical characteristics.
Physical types, Apache, V, 211
  endurance of, II, 45
  Indian race, IV, 354–365; V, 287–292
Physician, Indian, explanation of work, V, 445–446
  See also Medicine man.
Pia, given as synonym of Silla, IV, 39
Piankashaw (Piankeshaw) language, a dialect of the Miami, III, 399
  an Algonquin dialect (Piankasha), II, 341
Piankashaws (Piankeshaws, Piankishaws), III, 561; VI, 329, 481
  a division of the Miami, III, 404
  allies of Miamies, VI, 330
  also called Illinese, V, 41
  annuities, II, 584, 589
  census, I, 488–497; III, 621–628
  classification, III, 401; V, 145

Piankashaws—Continued
- condition, general, IV, 467, 468
  - report on, VI, 547
- creation myth, IV, 135–136
- defeat by Gen. Wayne, VI, 217
- descendants of Mound-builders, IV, 135
- friendly to the French, VI, 237
- funds required for, II, 572
- in Pontiac's conspiracy, VI, 243
- included in Algonquin group, II, 36
- lands, IV, 572
  - ceded by, II, 602, 603
  - disposal of, V, 496
  - purchased from, II, 593, 598, 600
- location, I, 488; III, 585, 592; IV, 461; VI, 705
  - maps showing, III, 96; VI, 519
- missionary work among, VI, 740
- peace sought by, VI, 343
- population, I, 523; III, 585, 592, 610; IV, 572; VI, 272, 275, 688, 693
- removal, VI, 516, 536
  - agreed to, VI, 445
  - plans for, III, 576, 577
- statistics on land, II, 605, 606
- treaty, V, 499
  - statement of, V, 497
  - synopsis of, V, 496
- warriors, number, III, 554, 561; VI, 271
- *See also* Peanquichas; Piankashaws and others; Piankashaws and Weas; Pyankeshaws.

Piankashaws and others, fiscal statistics, VI, 721, 723
- location, VI, 705
- population, VI, 705
- population (1812), V, 708

Piankashaws and Weas, location, V, 495; VI, 275
- map showing colony, IV, 180
- of Miami stock, V, 495
- population, V, 495; VI, 275
- removal, V, 495

Piankeshaws, Piankishaws. *See* Piankashaws.

Pianria, country occupied, III, 559
- warriors, estimate of, III, 559
- *See also* Peorias.

Piantias, warriors, estimate of, III, 555
- *See also* Peorias.

Picallipannish, population, I, 521

Picanipalish, included in Qualliamish, VI, 688

Picaris, VI, 688
- population, III, 633; VI, 709
- *See also* Picuris.

Pickens, Andrew, treaty concluded by, VI, 327

Pickens, Gen., attack on Cherokees, VI, 315

Pickering, Col., treaties conducted, V, 667, 668

Pickering, Dr., cited on California tribes, V, 216

Pickering, John, II, 349

Pickering, Timothy, commissioner at Canadaigua council, VI, 326

Pictographs, Alleghany River, IV, 172–173
- as a means of communication, I, 333; VI, 387, 389–390
- as a revelation of thought, I, 340; V, 64
- as an aid to memory, I, 339, 404–405
- as signatures, II, 226
- Assonet River, Mass., VI, 113
- bark used for, IV, 71
- Columbia River, V, 665
- distinction between kinds, I, 405
- explanation of, I, 407–411, 416–420; IV, 251–253
- Hudson River, III, 73–75
- illustrations, I, 336, 338, 342, 343, 352, 356, 361, 373, 383, 387, 406, 408, 409, 416, 417, 419, 420; III, 493; VI, 397
- Indian system of, V, 397
- interpretations, I, 336–337, 352, 353–354, 356–357, 361–366, 368–380, 383–388, 397, 401–404, 406–407
- Iroquois, described, I, 429
  - illustrated, I, 421, 429, 430; VI, 149
- materials used in making, I, 334
- New Mexico, illustration of, VI, 604
- object, I, 336
- of ancient nations, V, 397
- of devices to aid hunters, V, 150
- of hunting, I, 382–388
- of Manabozho's devices, illustrations, V, 150, 152
- on buffalo hide, illustration, V, 397
- on rocks, I, 334

Pictographs—Continued
  on trees, I, 334
  recording war exploits, III, 188
  representing census-roll, illustrated, II, 222
  representing guardian spirits, I, 390
  Rocky Mountain, discussed, III, 493–494
  subjects, I, 351–352
  supposed Aztec, of Christian origin, V, 62–63
  symbols used in, I, 338, 351, 386–388, 397
  use by the Chippewas, VI, 463–464
  use in petition to the President, I, 414–420
  uses, various, I, 339; V, 245
  where found, I, 334
  See also Inscriptions; Petroglyphs; Pictography.
Pictography, I, 333–430; II, 222–228; IV, 251–254; VI, 604–607
  among the Sioux, IV, 70
  antiquity, I, 341, 411–412
  illustrations, IV, 251, 253
  knowledge recorded by, V, 398
  three styles, IV, 252
  use of term, IV, 251
  See also Pictographs; Picture writing.
Picture-writing, Mexican, I, 350; VI, 584–585
  Mexican, destruction, V, 102, 103
  near Tacna, Peru, V, 659
  Toltecs and Aztecs, IV, 251
  use of term, IV, 251
  See also Pictography.
Pictured Rocks, IV, 316
  described, I, 169–170
  illustrated, I, 170
  no pictographs on, I, 406
Picuris, Pueblo de, population, I, 519
  See also Picaris; Vicuris.
Piedgans. *See* Piegans.
Piegan, a Blackfeet leader, V, 180
Piegans (Peigans, Piedgans, Piekans), V, 180; VI, 688
  alliance with Flatheads, V, 686
  bands, III, 631
  Blackfeet division, I, 437; V, 686
  country, III, 631; VI, 699
  division of the Sitkeas, III, 252
Piegans—Continued
  language, VI, 699
  origin of name, V, 180
  population, VI, 688, 698
  See also Blackfeet; Paegans; Pecaneaux.
Piekans. *See* Piegans.
Pierce, Capt., attack on force led by, VI, 164
Pierson, Hamilton W., story of Anacoana, II, 309
Pigmentation, racial differences, IV, 352–353
Pike, Lt. Z. M., expedition, I, 139–141; VI, 350
  population estimated by, III, 282; V, 479; VI, 350
Pilgrims, and Massasoit, illustration, II, 26
  meeting with Indians, II, 25
  principles of government, II, 24–25
  relations with various tribes, V, 219
  See also Puritans.
Pillagers, a name for Chippewas, II, 58
  annuities paid to, VI, 723
  changes in life, V, 187–188
  classification, II, 36; V, 184
  conflicts with Sioux, II, 153–155
  country described, V, 184–185; 190–191
  first notice of, VI, 483
  general account, V, 184–191
  home, permanent, V, 191
  land cessions, V, 188
  list of chiefs, V, 189
  numeral system, V, 244
  origin of name, II, 153; V, 145, 184, 185–186
  population, V, 185; VI, 707
  position as warriors, II, 59
  retreat of Sioux from, V, 98–99
  separation from Chippewas, V, 185
  social organization, V, 189
  treaty made, VI, 421
  villages, V, 185
  vocabulary, brief, II, 213
  war leaders, noted, II, 165
  wars with the Sioux, V, 185, 186–187
Pillar Rock, Oak Point, and Columbia River Indians, population, V, 705

Pima (Pimo) language, vocabulary, III, 460–462
Pimas (Pimos), cotton fabrics made by, IV, 33
  hair dressing, III, 290
  history, language, and archeology, III, 296–306
  location, III, 306
    map showing, III, 96
  migration legend, III, 296
  relations with Coco Maricopas, III, 296
Pinckney, Gov., dwelling, IV, 162
Pinclatchas, a Creek town, V, 262
Pinihoole, derivation of name, IV, 381
Pinyigoosân, name of medicine-bag, V, 424
Pinzon, Vincenti Yañez, Brazil discovered by, IV, 562
Pioneers, attitude toward Indians, IV, 316
Piorias. *See* Peorias and others.
Pipe bearers, II, 161, 166
Pipe, Capt., influence exerted, VI, 30
  treaty signed, VI, 303
Pipe dance, Winnebago, described, III, 286
Pipe of peace. *See* Calumet; Peace Pipe.
Pipe sculpture, II, 511–512; IV, 140–143
  aboriginal culture indicated, IV, 141
  art of, I, 74
  examples, discussed, IV, 141–142
  illustrated, I, 78
Pipes, an article of trade, I, 68; V, 692
  antique, illustration, VI, 92, 602
  antique stemless, described, I, 74–75
  black marble, Creeks, V, 692
  buried with the dead, IV, 54
  California and Oregon, III, 206
  ceremonial use, I, 31; V, 65–66, 169–170
  decoration, II, 511–512
  description, IV, 163, 166
  found in mounds, I, 67–68
  found on altars, I, 52, 73
  from burials, comparison of, I, 104
  illustrations, I, 74–78, 120; II, 90, 512; IV, 175; VI, 92, 602
Pipes—Continued
  materials used, I, 73; IV, 141, 175; V, 178; VI, 598
  Moqui, described, IV, 435–436
    illustrated, IV, 74
  Pennacook, illustrated, IV, 175
  pottery, age of, I, 74
    theory concerning, V, 110
  prototype in Europe, I, 68
  sandstone, in form of idol, I, 75
  short clay, I, 68
  Shoshonee, I, 214
  Sioux, II, 176
  stone, Moqui tradition of, IV, 87
    offered in sacrifice, IV, 128
    varieties used, II, 512
  use and description, I, 72–75
  use in making treaties, III, 263
  See also Peace pipe; Pipe sculpture; Smoking customs; Tobacco.
Pipe-stems, decoration, II, 512
  illustrations, II, 512
Pipe-stone, charms made, I, 86, 87
  ornaments, occurrence, I, 68
  traffic in, I, 67
Pipe-stone quarry, III, 257
  location, II, 176
Piscahoos(e), population, I, 521; VI, 702
  See also piscous.
Piscataquaukes, derivation of name, V, 223
  members of Pennacook Confederacy, V, 223
Piscataways, VI, 143, 145
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 735
Pisco, skulls from cemetery, II, 329
Piscous (Pisquouse), classification, III, 402
  population, V, 705; VI, 700
  See also Piscahoos.
Pishquitpahs, location, III, 570
  population, III, 570, 609
Pisquouse. *See* Piscous.
Pist-chins, language, mention of, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598
  population, IV, 598
Pistol River, Indians of, VI, 702
Pitcher, Dr. Zina, IV, 149, 492
  paper on Indian medicine, IV, 502–519
  reference to work, VI, 632

Pitchlyn, John, work of, IV, 545
Pitt Mountain, origin of name, III, 165
Pitt River Indians, depredations, III, 166
Pittsburg, fort established on site, VI, 213, 214
  sketch by Lewis Brantz, III, 336
Pi-Utahs, a part of the Utah tribe, V, 199
  country occupied by band of, V, 201
  population, V, 201, 498
Pizarro, III, 23; VI, 48
  conquests, III, 27
  discoveries, mention of, IV, 123
  policy in Peru, V, 88–89
  references to, III, 23; VI, 48
Pizhu, Chief, I, 107
Place names, formation, III, 502–505
  lists, with meanings, III, 506–509
  poetic character, III, 328
  See also Names, geographical.
Plants. *See* Agriculture; Food; Medicinal plants; Roots.
  See also under the names of plants, as Corn, Tobacco, etc.
Platanar, mission of Barcelona Province, IV, 556
Plates, metal, Creeks, mention of, V, 283
  Muscogees, described, V, 660
  preserved by the Muscogees, III, 88–90
Platina, specific gravity, I, 150
  where found, I, 150
Platte River, tribes on, VI, 556
Pleurisy, remedy for, IV, 512
Plow, substitute, V, 106
Plugge's Town, IV, 624, 625, 630, 631, 632
Plum-stone game, Dacotahs, IV, 64
Plymouth, attack, by Indians, VI, 164, 165
  Indian warfare, VI, 158–160
  landing of colony, VI, 104
  missionary work, VI, 734, 736
Pocahontas, II, 29; IV, 613
  death, VI, 744
  error in painting of, III, 66
  John Smith saved, VI, 97
  true name, II, 66
Pocanokets. *See* Pokanokets.
Pocasset. *See* Troy Indians.
Poch en tal le hasse, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Po chis hach cha, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Po con talla hassa Town, a Creek town, IV, 576
  chief of, IV, 576
Pocopassum, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Pocuntullahases, a Creek town, V, 262
Po-da-wand-um-ee (Po-da-waud-umeeg), separation from Ojibwas, II, 139
  westward migration, II, 139
  See also Potawatomies.
Poemtucks, VI, 159
Poetic development of Indian mind, III, 326–328
Poetry, Indian, examples, V, 608–611
Pogodque, population, III, 633
Pohanti, IV, 77
Poh-lik, application of term, III, 151
Pohlik-Klamath villages, III, 145
Poinsett, Secretary of War, VI, 492, 506
  decision regarding Cherokee murders, VI, 502
  negotiations with Cherokees, VI, 493
Point Iroquois, origin of name, II, 149; VI, 201
Point St. Ignace, census of Indians, I, 458–467
  mission established, VI, 257
Poisoning, among the Ojibwas, II, 145
  remedies, IV, 515
Poiwateeg, an ancient Chippewa village, V, 147
Pojoaque. *See* Pejodque; Pogodque; Pojodque.
Pojodque (Pojuaque), language, V, 689
  population, I, 519; VI, 709
Pokanoket Bashabary, tribes composing VI, 150
Pokanokets (Pocanokets), II, 25; V, 121
  affiliations, VI, 150
  history, VI, 113–115
  independence in warfare, VI, 199
  name for the Wampanoags, VI, 103, 150
  New England tribe, VI, 125
  relations with colonists, VI, 173
  ruler of, VI, 173
  tribal circle, VI, 173
  war, instigated by, VI, 172
    on colonists, VI, 152–172

Politeness among Indians, iv, 342–345
Polygamy, among Comanches, i, 235–236; ii, 131–132
    Dacotahs, iii, 234–235
    Oregon Indians, v, 654
  cause of quarrels, ii, 184
  cause of suicide, iii, 235
Polynesia, manufacture of cloth in, i, 90–91
Pometacom (Pometakom), vi, 98, 184, 248, 647
  correct name of King Philip, vi, 151
  son of Massasoit, vi, 103
  See also King Philip.
Pomo, language, iii, 112
  treaty, iii, 112
Pomo and others, population, iii, 634
Ponacks, a synonym of Bonacks (q. v.), vi, 686
Pon a hor thlock o, chief at Euchee, iv, 580
Ponashita, population, i, 521
  See also Bonacks.
Poncas, affiliations, iv, 550
  census, vi, 556
  location, iii, 594; vi, 556, 695, 705
  population, i, 523; iii, 594, 609; vi, 688, 695, 696, 705
  See also Puncas.
Ponce de Leon, ii, 35
  defeated by Indians, v, 410
  expedition of, iii, 24–25; vi, 38
  Florida discovered, i, 134
  Florida named, vi, 743
Ponch Indians. *See* Paunch Indians.
Ponci, an Apache chief, v, 206
Pond, Messrs., work, iv, 547, 548, 549
Pond Orrilles. *See* Pend d'Oreilles.
Pond, Rev. Gideon H., a Dacotah missionary, iv, 492, 497
  paper on Medicine-men, iv, 641–651
  quoted on Dakotah medicine-men, vi, 648–657
  work of, iv, 548, 549
Pond, Rev. S. W., work, iv, 548, 549
Ponderas, missionary work among, vi, 734, 735
  population, i, 521; vi, 701
  See also Kalispel.
Ponishta Bonacks, Snake River, population, vi, 701
Ponpon, Uchees at, iii, 26
Pontiac, i, 412; iii, 22, 57, 59; iv, 614; v, 122, 139; vi, 141, 268, 647
  activities in Illinois, ii, 306–308
  actual position, iv, 481
  appearance, ii, 308
  argument used by, vi, 449
  at Detroit, vi, 382
  confederation against English, vi, 242–243
  council headed, ii, 243, 248, 270, 290
  death, two accounts, ii, 308
  doctrine, v, 151
  joined by Ojibwas, ii, 148
  leader, possibly, at Braddock's defeat, vi, 217
  opposition to Anglo-Saxons, v, 45
  oratory, iv, 627; v, 410, 518
  origin uncertain, ii, 308
  quotation from speech, iii, 55
  reference to speeches, vi, 300
  resistance to the English, ii, 241; v, 528
  siege of Detroit, details, ii, 242–308
  speech against the English, ii, 248–249
  speech to the French, ii, 270–272, 290
  tribes joining conspiracy of, vi, 243
  tribes organized, ii, 242, 307
  victory at Bloody Bridge, vi, 287
  White encroachment, efforts to check, vi, 248, 249
Pontiac manuscript, ii, 240–308
Pontiac's Confederacy, tribes composing, ii, 242, 307
Pontiac's conspiracy, account of, vi, 242–248
Poor, Col., charge led by, vi, 309, 310
Popquit, son of Massasoit, vi, 151
Population, Indian (general), v, 479–506
  according to States, iii, 583–586, 598
  affected by food supply, iv, 350
  at time of discovery, v, 34–35
  at time of removal, vi, 518, 522
  decrease in, i, 191–192, 434; ii, 95, 172; iii, 95, 221, 614; v, 33–34, 479–480; vi, 180–181
    causes of, vi, 561–563
  density, vi, 599
  effect of smallpox, i, 257

Population, Indian—Continued
- estimated by Col. Bouquet, V, 479; VI, 685
  - in groups, III, 575–576
- estimates, official, V, 34–35
  - unreliable, V, 34–35
  - various, V, 479
- estimating, difficulties, I, 227
- geographical divisions, V, 480
- new territory, I, 192
- Northwest, 1812, V, 708
- old States, 1824, V, 450
- over-estimation, VI, 349
- report by Indian Bureau, VI, 414–415
- tables showing, I, 439–524; III, 551–635, 601–606; IV, 572–582, 590, 598, 603, 608; V, 701–708; VI, 686–718
- total, estimated, III, 95, 559, 581; IV, 459; V, 472, 480, 485; VI, 481, 564
- upper Mississippi, III, 562–569
- wandering tribes, VI, 705
- west of the Rockies, III, 596
- western and northern tribes, VI, 271
- wild mountain tribes, I, 520

Population, by tribes and territories:[1]
- Abinaki (Abinakies, Abonakies and others), VI, 270, 714
- Absarokas (Absarokes). *See* Crows.
- Acazingo, III, 516
- Accohanocs, III, 517
- Accomacks, III, 517
- Acoma, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 686, 709
- Actopan (Othomi), III, 517
- Adai (Addees, Addies, Adees), III, 585, 596; VI, 686
- Adirondacks (Orondocks), VI, 270, 714
- Aegakötchëising, I, 478
- Ahahawa, III, 522
- Ah-hoo-zeeb-kaw's band, I, 498–507
- Akosa's band, I, 458–467
- Alabamas, III, 524

Population, by tribes—Continued
- Alagonkins and others, VI, 714
- Algonquin group, I, 523; VI, 275
- Algonquins, VI, 270, 272, 686
  - New York, I, 524
  - Ohio Valley, IV, 605–606
- Algonquins, Western, I, 488
- Alibamu (Alibamous), III, 399
- Allakaweah, III, 525
- Alleghany Reservation, VI, 690
- Alsea (Ulseahs), III, 571
- Amalistes, III, 525
- Ambatawwoot, II, 28
- Anadarko (Ah-nau-dah-kas, An-a-dah-has, Anadahkas, Anadahkoes, Anadakas, An-a-dak-kas, Andaicos) I, 518; III, 635; V, 702; VI, 686, 699, 704, 708
  - Ionies, and Caddoes, V, 712
- Ance's band, I, 458
- Apaches, I, 245, 518, 519; III, 528; VI, 686, 704, 705
- Apaches, Lepans, and Jicarillas, V, 484
- Apalachee (Apolashe, Asphalashe), III, 585, 596
- Apalachicola (Apalachicolas, Appalachicolas), III, 531, 609, 610; VI, 686
- Apalousa. *See* Opelusa.
- Appalachian group, I, 523; VI, 276, 518, 522, 690
- Arapahoes (Arepahas, Arrepahas, Kaninahoick), I, 245, 519, 523; III, 404, 533, 596, 609; V, 495; VI, 556, 686, 704, 713
- Arbre Croche, III, 535
- Arikara (Aricaree, Arickaras, Arickarees, Aurickarees, Rees), I, 257, 523; III, 595, 609, 630, 631; V, 494; VI, 556, 686, 688, 704
- Arkansas Indians, III, 537
- Assiniboin (Assinaboines, Assinaboins, Assiniboine, Assiniboins), I, 257, 523; III, 539, 594, 609, 631; V, 494; VI, 556, 686, 704
- Atfalati (Sualtine, Wappatoo), I, 521; III, 570–576, 609; VI, 689, 701
- Athapascas, II, 27, 28; V, 172
- Bannock (Bonacks, Bonnacks, Ponishta Bonacks, Ponashita), I, 521; V, 493; VI, 697, 701
- Beaver Indians, IV, 558

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[1] In this section on population data, an effort has been made to identify the tribal names used by Schoolcraft with the accepted forms as given in the Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico (Bur. Amer. Ethnol. Bull. 30). The synonyms follow the present spelling in parentheses or are cross-referenced to it.—EDITOR.

Population, by tribes—Continued
Beaver Island Indians, I, 458; III, 526; IV, 558
Belantse-eteas (Belautse-etea). *See* Hidatsa.
Bidai (Bedies), IV, 558; VI, 686
Biloxi (Beloxi, Billoxie, Bolixes), III, 585, 596; V, 702
Birch Bay Indians. *See* Semiahmoo.
Blackfeet (Blackfoot), I, 257, 523; III, 595, 609, 631; IV, 560; V, 180, 494; VI, 556, 686, 698, 704
Blackfeet Sioux, V, 494
Bois Forte bands (Chippewas). *See* Sugwaundugahwininewug.
Brothertons, I, 523; III, 583; V, 504; VI, 686, 707
Brulé (Broulè) Sioux, V, 494; VI, 713
Buffalo Reservation, VI, 690
Caddoes (Caddos, Caddow), I, 518, 523; III, 402, 585, 596, 609, 635; V, 702; VI, 686, 699
Caddoes and others, VI, 704
Caddoes, Ionies, and An-a-dak-kas, V, 712; VI, 708
Calapooya (Calipoa, Callahpoewah, Callapuyas, Callipoogas) I, 521; III, 201, 572, 609, 632; V, 492; VI, 686, 701
Calasthocle. *See* Quinaielt.
California Indians, I, 520, 523; III, 112, 116, 634; V, 217, 484; VI, 686, 705, 710, 711, 715
California Indians, southern, IV, 608
California Missions, I, 520
Caloait (Calooit). *See* Skilloot.
Cape Flattery Indians. *See* Makah.
Carp River Indians. *See* Ommunise.
Cascades. *See* Watlala.
Catawba(s) (Catabas), I, 524; III, 583; VI, 179, 272, 686, 705
Cathlacomatup (Cathlacommatups, Cathlacumup, Cathlacumups), III, 570, 571
Cathlamet (Catelamet, Cathlamah, Kathlamet, Kathlamit), I, 521; III, 571, 609; VI, 701, 702
Cathlanaquiahs (Cathlanahquiiahs), III, 570

Population, by tribes—Continued
Cathlapotle (Quathlapohtle), III, 571
Cattaraugus Reservation, VI, 690
Catugajay Creek division, I, 508
Caughnawaga (Cognawagoes), VI, 714
Cayuga (Kayuga), I, 441, 519, 523; III, 583; IV, 603, 604, 606; V, 504, 668; VI, 275, 694, 705, 707, 714
Cayugas and Senecas, VI, 718
Cayuses (Waulatpus, Willetpos. Yeletpo), I, 521; III, 570, 632; V, 493, 705, 706, 707; VI, 686, 700, 701
Chan wap pan. *See* Shanwappon.
Charcowa(h), III, 572, 609
Chastacosta (Shistacoostee, Sisticoosta), V, 493; VI, 702
Cheboygan (Cheboigan) band, I, 478
Chehalis (Che-ha-lis, Chehaylis, Chickeeles, Chihalis, Chillates), I, 521; III, 201, 571; IV, 599; V, 703; VI, 686, 701, 703
Chehalis and Puget's Sound, V, 705
Chemetunne (Yakshute, Yah Shutes), IV, 493; VI, 702
Chemovi. *See* Sichomovi.
Chenos, Huron, I, 458
Chepawas (Cheppewyans). *See* Chippewa.
Cherokees, I, 508, 518, 523; III, 584, 585, 596, 609, 610; IV, 574, 607; V, 483, 504; VI, 272, 480, 481, 530, 686, 688, 690, 704, 708
Chetco (Cheattee) V, 493; VI, 702
Chetlessentan (Chetlessantun), V, 493; VI, 702
Cheyenne(s) (Chayennes), I, 245, 519, 523; III, 595, 609, 630, 631; V, 494; VI, 556, 686, 705, 713
Chickasaw(s) (Chickasas), I, 508, 523; III, 584, 597, 610; IV, 574; V, 504; VI, 272, 686, 690, 704
Chilluckittequaw (Chillukkitequaw), III, 570, 609; V, 706
Chimakum (Chin-a-kum, Port Townsend Indians), IV, 598; V, 491, 703, 705; VI, 703
Chimnahpan (Chimnahpum, Chinnahpum), III, 570, 609; V, 706
Chinook (Chinnooks), I, 521; III, 201, 571, 609, 632; V, 492, 705; VI, 686, 701

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Chinook—Continued
    Lower, v, 490; vi, 703
    Upper, v, 490; vi, 703
  Chippewa (Chipeway), i, 458, 468, 523, 524; ii, 27, 139–140; iii, 523, 524, 563, 584, 591; iv, 572, 609; v, 495, 708; vi, 271, 272, 275, 276, 686, 693, 714
    Bois Forte bands, vi, 692, 707
    Grand Traverse Bay, iii, 523, 524
    Lake Indians, vi, 692
    Mississippi, vi, 704, 707
    mixed bloods, vi, 692
    Swan Creek and Black River, vi, 689, 692, 705
    See also Chippewas and Ottawas, etc.; Chippewyan; Ojibways.
  Chippewas and Ottowas, iii, 610; vi, 705, 714
  Chippewas and Saginaw, vi, 692
  Chippewas, Boisfort and Red Lake, vi, 707
  Chippewas of Lake Superior, vi, 692, 704, 707
    of Saginaw, vi, 705
  Chippewas, Ottawas, and Pottowattomies, iii, 610
  Chippewyan, v, 172
  Chockrelatan (Chockreletan, Chocreleatan), v, 492; vi, 702
  Choctaws (Choctas), i, 522, 523; iii, 584, 585, 597, 609, 610; iv, 574; v, 483, 504; vi, 272, 479, 686, 690, 704
  Chopemnish (Chopunnish). *See* Nez Percés.
  Christian Indians, i, 488; v, 504; vi, 705
    and Munceys, v, 495
  Cia, iii, 633; vi, 709
  Cibolos, ancient. *See* Zuñi.
  Clackama (Clackamas, Clarkamus), i, 521; iii, 572, 609, 632; v, 492; vi, 686, 701
  Clackstar. *See* Tlatskanai.
  Clahaquah (Clannahqueh), iii, 571
  Clallams (Noosclalum, Nooselalum, Duginass, Noostlalums, Skallam's Skallum), i, 521; iv, 598; v, 491, 700, 703, 705; vi, 700, 703

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Clamoctomichs. *See* Klumaitumsh.
  Claninnatas, iii, 571
  Clannarminnamuns. *See* Kathlaminimin.
  Clatsop (Chatsops, Klatsops), i, 521; iii, 201, 571, 609, 632; v, 492; vi, 686, 701
  Clear Lake Indians, iii, 110, 634
  Clear Lake region, vi, 711
  Clowwewalla (Tum Waters), iii, 632
  Cochite, Pueblo de, i, 519
  Cochiti, iii, 633; vi, 709
  Coeur d'Alenes, vi, 700, 701. *See* Skitswish.
  Cognawagoes [Caughnawaga] and Connefedagoes [Oka], vi, 714
  Cognawagoes [Caughnawaga] and others, vi, 714
  Columbia Valley, iii, 570–572
  Colville (Collville, Schwo-Yelpi, Wheelpo), i, 521; iii, 572, 609, 632; v, 490, 705, 706, 707; vi, 700, 701
    and Spokane, v, 706, 707
  Comanches (Camanches, Na-u-ni, Padoucas), i, 230, 244, 245, 260, 518, 519; iii, 596, 609, 635; v, 702; vi, 686, 705, 708
    and Kioways, vi, 705
  Con-a-ha-ta-kaw's band, i, 498
  Conerd, Helene, i, 521
  Conestoga (Susquehannocks), vi, 131
  Connecticut Indian, i, 524
  Connefedagoes [Oka] and Cognawagoes [Caughnawaga], vi, 714
  Connewango (Connewangos), iii, 288
  Conoy (Conoies, Conoys), v, 668; vi, 714
  Coos (Cookkoo-oose), iii, 571, 609
  Cooniac (Konick), i, 521
  Coosadas. *See* Koasati.
  Coospellar. *See* Kalispel.
  Cootenays. *See* Kutenai.
  Cootenays [Kutenai] and Flatbows (Flatboys), vi, 700; v, 705
  Coppermine Indians, ii, 27
  Cosulhentan (Cosutheutun). *See* Kwusathlkhuntunne.

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Cowlitz (Cow-e-litz, Cowe-wa-chin), I, 521; IV, 598, 599; V, 705; VI, 686, 701
  Cowlitz and Upper Chihalis, V, 490, 703; VI, 703
  Cree (Knisteneaux) III, 593
  Creeks, I, 518, 522, 523; III, 584, 596, 609, 610; IV, 574; V, 263, 483, 494, 504; VI, 333, 369, 532, 686, 690, 708
  Crees, III, 593, 609; VI, 556, 686, 705
  Crows (Absarokas, Absarokes, Upsarokas), I, 523; III, 595, 609, 630, 631; IV, 494; VI, 556, 686, 705
  Cushhooks (Clishhooks), III, 572, 609
  Cushnas, VI, 710
  Dakotas (Dacota, La Sue), I, 498, 525; III, 614; VI, 275, 714
  Dalles bands, V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 700
  Deagothee Loochoo. *See* Tuthkuthkutchin.
  Delawares, I, 488, 518, 523; III, 424, 583, 585, 592, 609, 610, 635; IV, 572, 606; V, 140, 142, 495, 708; VI, 271, 272, 687, 699, 705, 714
    and Munsees, VI, 275
    and Shawnees, VI, 708
    of Indiana (1812), V, 708
  Des Chutes (De Chutes), I, 521; III, 632; V, 493, 706, 707; VI, 686 700, 701
  Detroit Chippewas, I, 458
  Diegueños, II, 100
  Diggers, V, 498
  Dogribs. *See* Thlingehadinne.
  Drummond Island band, I, 458
  Dwamish (Nee-wam-ish, Port Orchard Indians), IV, 958; V, 491, 703, 705; VI, 703
  Echeloot (Eskeloot). *See* Tlakluit.
  Eel River Indians, III, 584
  Eel River region, VI, 711
  Ehihalis [Chehalis], V, 490
  El Paso Pueblo, VI, 687
  Eneshur, V, 706
  Ene[e]shure, III, 570, 609
  Eshquagonabee's band, I, 458
  Eskeloot, III, 570, 609
  Eskini (Erskines), VI, 710

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Etchareottine (Edchautawoot), II, 27
  Etcheridiegottine (Tsillawadoot), II, 28
  Euquachee. *See* Yukichetunne.
  Euquatops. *See* Mescaleros.
  Euquatops and Muscaleros. *See* Mescaleros.
  Eutahs of New Mexico. *See* Ute.
  Ewinte. *See* Uinta.
  Fall Indians, III, 251
  Flatbows, V, 490
  Flatbows and Cootenays [Kutenai], VI, 700
  Flatheads, I, 521; V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 556, 687, 700, 701
  Flat River band, I, 478
  Flattery Indians. *See* Makah.
  Florida Indians, I, 522, 523
  Folsavoins. *See* Menominee.
  Fort Village band, I, 478
  Foxes (Outtagomies), III, 259, 562, 593, 609; VI, 271, 714
  Foxes and Sacs, I, 488, 523; VI, 687
  Fresno Indians, IV, 608
  Fresno Reservation, VI, 715
  Fresnos of California, VI, 687
  Goodrod's band, I, 498
  Good Thunder's band, I, 498
  Grand Island Indians, I, 458
  Grand Rapids band, I, 478
  Grande Ronde. *See* Willewah.
  Green Bay region, VI, 271
  Griswold Colony band, I, 478
  Gros Ventres, I, 523; III, 594, 609, 630, 631; V, 494; VI, 556, 687, 698, 705
  Gros Ventres of the Prairie, III, 595; VI, 556, 687
  Groton, III, 583
  Habe Napo. *See* Khabenapo.
  Hainai (Ionees, Ionies), I, 518; III, 635; V, 702; VI, 687, 699
  Hannakallal (Hannakallah), III, 571, 609
  Hano (Tanoquevi), I, 519
  Hehighenimmo (Hihighenimmo). *See* Sanpoil.
  Herring Pond, III, 583

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Hidatsa (Belantse-eteas, Belautse-etea, Minatarees, Minetarees, Minnatarees, Minnetarees), I, 257, 523; III, 251, 252, 594, 609; IV, 559; V, 494; VI, 687, 705
  Hilleamuck. *See* Tillamook.
  Hocks [Hoako], VI, 710
  Hohilpos, III, 572
  Hokamish. *See* Skokomish.
  Holilepas, VI, 710
  Homamish (Homanish). *See* Skomamish.
  Hookluhmic Indians. *See* Lummi.
  Ho-pee-kaw's band, I, 498
  Hohilpos (Ho pil po), V, 706
  Hopi (Moques, Moqui Pueblos, Moquis), I, 244, 245, 519; III, 633; V, 484; VI, 687
  Hunkpapa (Onkpapah), V, 494
  Hurons, (Wayondotts, Wiyondotts, Wyandots, Wyandotts) I, 441; III, 583, 584, 590, 610; V, 495, 708; VI, 270, 271, 272, 275, 705, 714
  Huta Napo. *See* Kuhlanapo.
  Ietan, Ietam, (Jetam) III, 597, 609
  Interior Indians (Chippewas), VI, 692
  Ionees (Ionies) *See* Hainai.
  Ionies, An-a-dak-kas, and Caddoes, V, 712; VI, 708
  Ionies and others, VI, 704
  Iowas, (Ihoways, Ioways), I, 498; III, 258, 562, 585, 593, 609; IV, 466, 572; V, 495; VI, 687, 705
  Iroquois, IV, 603, 604; V, 481; VI, 270, 275, 687
    and Algonquins of New York, VI, 690
    Confederacy, IV, 603, 604
    group, I, 441, 523
    of New York, VI, 718
    of the West, VI, 275
  Isanyati. *See* Santee.
  Is-chaw-go-baw-kaw's band, I, 498
  Isletta Pueblo de, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 687, 709
    below El Paso, I, 519
  Jemez (Jenies), III, 633; VI, 687, 709
  Jemez, Pueblo de, I, 519
  Jicarillas, I, 245, 519
  John Day's River, V, 706

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Juparivi. *See* Shipaulovi.
  Kadohadacho. *See* Caddoes.
  Kagwatosa's band, I, 458
  Kah lis pelm, V, 707
  Kahtais, V, 491, 703; VI, 703
  Kahuncles, III, 571
  Kalawatset (Killawats), III, 571
  Kalispel (Calapelins, Calespelins, Colespelin, Coospellar, Kah lis pelm, Kullus Palus, Pend' Oreilles, Ponderas), I, 521; V, 707, VI, 686, 701
  Kamiah (Kimooenim Band), III, 570
  Kancho or Hare. *See* Kawchodinne.
  Kaninahoick. *See* Arapaho.
  Kansa (Kanzas), I, 523; III, 480, 594, 609; IV, 572; V, 495; VI, 687
    tribe, VI, 705
  Kansas Territory Indians, VI, 518
  Kaquaiths, V, 491, 703; VI, 703
  Kaskaias, III, 596, 609
  Kaskaskias, I, 525; III, 584, 593; IV, 572; VI, 272, 687
    and others, VI, 705, 714
    and Peorias, III, 609; VI, 693
  Kathlaminimim (Clannarminnamuns), III, 571
  Kawchodinne (Kancho or Hare), II, 28
  Keawas, III, 596, 609
  Keechies [Kichkai], Wacoes, and Towacarros, VI, 705
  Kettle Falls, I, 521
  Khabenapo (Habe Napo, Habe-Napo), III, 109, 634
  Khwaishtunnetunne (Whistanatin, Wishtenatin), V, 493; VI, 702
  Kichkai (Kechies, Keechies, Koechies), I, 518; III, 635; V, 702; VI, 687, 699, 708
  Kickapoo (Kick-u-al-lis, Kikialis, Kikiallis), IV, 598; V, 491, 704; VI, 703
  Kickapoos, I, 488, 523; III, 585, 592, 609, 610; IV, 572; V, 495; VI, 272, 687, 705, 714
  Kilamukes (Killamucks). *See* Tillamook.

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Killaxthokle (Killaxthocles, Killaythocles), iii, 571, 609
  Kimooenim band. *See* Kamiah.
  King's River Indians, vi, 715
  Kinkla, iii, 201
  Kiowas (Keawas, Kioways, Kayaguas), i, 245, 518, 523; iii, 596, 609; vi, 687, 705, 708
  Kitunaha, v, 707
  Klamath Reservation, vi, 715
  Klamath River villages, iii, 138, 156, 634
  Klamaths (Klamets), iii, 201; v, 493
  Klikitat (Klickitats, Clickatais, Clickatats, Clickitats, Klikatats, Vancouvers), i, 521; iii, 632; v, 490, 705, 707; vi, 700, 701
  Klumaitumsh (Clamoctomichs), iii, 571
  Knisteneaux. *See* Cree.
  Koasati (Coosadas, Coshattees, Coshatties), iii, 399, 585, 596
  Koog-ay-ray-kaw's band, i, 498
  Kosotshe (Luckkarso), iii, 571, 690
  Kotsoteka (Koolsatik-ara), i, 498
  Kuhlanapo (Huta Napo), iii, 634
  Kuitsh (Umquas), i, 521; iii, 201, 632; v, 492; vi, 689, 701
  Kullas Palus. *See* Kalispel.
  Kutauwa (Neeketoos), iii, 571
  Kutenai (Contenay, Cootenays, Coutenay, Kootamies), i, 521; v, 490, 705, 706; vi, 700, 701
  Kwaiailk (Staktomish, Staktomish), v, 701, 704
  Kwatami (Quahtomah, Quatomah, Saquaacha), v, 492; vi, 702
  Kwehtlmamish (N'quutl-ma-mish), v, 704; vi, 703
  Kworatem (Quoratem), iii, 151
  Kwusathlkhuntunne (Cosulhentan, Cosutheutun), v, 492; vi, 702
  Laguna, i, 519; iii, 633; vi, 687, 709
    See also Clear Lake Indians.
  Lahanna, iii, 572, 609
  Lake Calhoun band, i, 498
  Lake Huron Chippewas, i, 458
  Lake Indians (Chippewas), vi, 692
  Lakmiut Sackanoir, Suchamier), i, 521; vi, 689, 701
  La Purissima Concepcion, i, 520

Population, by tribes—Continued
  L'Arbre Croche Ottowas, i, 478
  Larlielo (Lartielo). *See* Spokan.
  La Sue. *See* Dakota.
  Leech Lake Indians, iii, 366
  Lentes (Lentis, Leunis or Leutis), i, 519; iii, 633; vi, 687, 709
  Lewis River Snakes, v, 493
  Lipans, i, 518; iii, 635; vi, 687, 705, 708
  Little Crow's Village, i, 498
  Little Dekonie's band, i, 498
  Little Flathead Indians, vi, 701
  Little Mills band, i, 498
  Little Six's band, i, 498
  Little Thunder's band, i, 498
  Lokulk. *See* Sokulk.
  Loquamish, v, 491
  Lower Chinooks, v, 703
  Lower Creeks, v, 483
    See also Creeks.
  Luckawis, iii, 571
  Luckkarso. *See* Kosotshe.
  Lucktons, iii, 571
  Lummi (Hooklumic Indians, Nooklummi, Nookluolamic, Noothum), i, 521; v, 701, 704; vi, 701, 703
  Mackanotin. *See* Minkonotunne.
  Mahican (Mohicans, Mohiccans, Mohickons), iv, 606; v, 668; vi, 714
  Mahicans of Stockbridge, v, 504
  Makah (Cape Flattery Indians, Ma-caw, Makahs, Makaw, Yacaws), i, 521; iv, 598; v, 700, 703; vi, 687, 689, 701, 703
  Mandans (Mandon), i, 257, 523; iii, 249–250, 253, 254, 595, 609, 630, 631; v, 494, vi, 556, 687, 705
  Manistee River Indians, i, 458
  Manzana, i, 519
  Maple River band, i, 478
  Mariposa, vi, 687
  Mariposa County Indians, iv, 608
  Mariposa, Fresno, and Merceda Indians, v, 484
  Marlain or Kite (Marlin or Kite). *See* Staitan.
  Martha's Vineyard, iii, 583
  Mascoutens (Mascoudins, Mascoutins, Miscotins, Musquatons, Musquitons), iv, 245; vi, 204, 272, 714

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Mashpee (Marshpee), iii, 583
  Massachusetts Indians, i, 287
  Maw-kuh-soonch-kaw's band, i, 498
  Mdewakanton (Medawakantons, People of the Lakes) iii, 562, 613, 614, 707
  Mendocino Reservation, vi, 715
  Menduwakanton [Mdewakanton] and Wapakotah [Wahpekute] Sioux, vi, 707
  Menominee (Folsavoins, Menomeenees, Menomenes, Menominees, Menomonees, Menomonies, Monomonies, Mynomanies), i, 488, 523; iii, 562, 584, 591, 610; v, 708; vi, 271, 275, 687, 691, 705, 707, 714
  Mercede Indians, iv, 608; vi, 687
  Mescaleros (Euquatops, Muscalaroes, Muscaleros, Mus-ka-le-ras), i, 239, 518; vi, 687, 705, 708
  Miami (Miamies, Twightwees), i, 488, 523; iii, 584, 591, 610; iv, 572, 605; v, 495, 708; vi, 272, 275, 499, 687, 705, 714
  Miamis and others (1812), v, 708
  Michigamea (Mitchigamas), vi, 714
  Michigan tribes, vi, 692
  Michopdo (Wachucknas), vi, 710
  Micksuckealton (Micksucksealtom), iii, 572; v, 706
  Micmac (Souriquois), i, 524; vi, 689
  Middle Village, i, 478
  Mic-mis-souks, iv, 598
  Mikasuki (Mickasaukies), i, 522
  Mikonotunne (Mackanotin, Maquelnoten), v, 493; vi, 702
  Minatarees [and variant spellings]. *See* Hidatsa.
  Minikonga, v, 494
  Miseekwigweelis (Mis-kai-whu), v, 704; vi, 703
  Mission, v, 707; vi, 700
  Mission band, iii, 632
  Missions, California, i, 520
  Missisauga (Mississagies, Mississagues), iii, 199; vi, 272, 275
  Missouris (Missourias), i, 523; iii, 593; iv, 573; v, 494; vi, 687
    and Ottoes, vi, 706
  Mitchigamas and others. *See* Michigamea.

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Mixed bloods (Chippewas), i, 520; vi, 692
  Mohawk (Mohocks), iv, 603, 604, 606; v, 668; vi, 275, 687, 714
  Mohegan, i, 524; iii, 583
  Molala (Molallas, Mole Alleg, Molealleg, Mollales), i, 521; iii, 632; v, 492
  Mountain Indians, ii, 27
  Muhzheguning, i, 458
  Multnomah, iii, 570
  Muncee (Munceys and Christian Indians, Munsays, Munsees, Munsees and Delawares, Munsies), i, 523; v, 495, 668; vi, 275, 687, 705, 707, 714
  Murphy, N. C., neighborhood of, i, 508
  Muscogee (Muscogulges), i, 266; v, 504
  Musquakeys [Foxes] and others, vi, 714
  Musquatons and others (Musquitons and others). *See* Mascoutens.
  Mustees and Mulattoes. *See* Mixed-bloods.
  Nahane (Nohannies), ii, 28
  Nambe, iii, 633; vi, 687, 709
  Nanticokes, v, 668; vi, 714
  Narragansetts, i, 524; iii, 583; vi, 687
  Nasumi (Nasomah), v, 492; vi, 702
  Nataotin (Nateotetains), ii, 28
  Natchez, vi, 272
  Natchitoches, iii, 585, 596
  Navaho (Nabajos, Navahoes, Navajo) and Utahs, i, 244, 245, 519; iv, 214, 220; v, 484, 498; vi, 687, 705
  Naw-key-ku-kaw's band, i, 498
  Nebraska Territory Indians, v, 486
  Nechacoke[e], iii, 570
  Neeketoos. *See* Kutauwa.
  Nee-wam-ish, iv, 598
  Nemalquinner, iii, 570
  Neosho Agency, i, 498
  Neosho Senecas and Shawnees, vi, 687
  Neutral Nation, iv, 207
  Ne-u-tub-vig, iv, 598

Population, by tribes—Continued
  New Mexico Indians, I, 245, 518, 519, 523; V, 484; VI, 687
  New York Indians, III, 583, 586, 610; IV, 572
  Nez Percés (Säaptins), I, 521; III, 570, 609, 632; V, 490, 493, 705, 706, 707; VI, 688, 700, 701
  Nipis[s]ing, VI, 272
  Nisqualli (Nisqually, Qualliamish, Quallyamish, Squalli-ah-mish, Squalliamish, Squally-ah-mish, Squallymish), I, 521; IV, 598; V, 701, 704, 705; VI, 688
  Nisqually River Indians, V, 491
  Nome Cult Valley, VI, 715
  Nome Lacke Reservation, VI, 715
  Nooksak (Nooksaak), V, 491, 704; VI, 703
  North Carolina tribes, VI, 182
  North-western California, III, 634
  Nottoway (Nottaways, Nottowas, Nottoways), I, 524; III, 583; VI, 688
  Nukwatsamish (N'qua-cha-mish), V, 704; VI, 703
  Nusehtsatl (Noosechatl, Noo-seh-chatl), V, 703; VI, 703
  Oglala (Ogeelala, Ogellahs, Ogellalas), I, 523; V, 494; VI, 556, 688, 713
  Ohio Valley Indians, IV, 605–606
  Ojibways, II, 139–140
    See also Chippewa.
  Okinagans (Okinakanes, Okonagan, Okonagon, Okonegan, Oukinagans, Oukinegans), I, 521; III, 632; V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 688, 700, 702, 710
    and Pisquouse, V, 705; VI, 700
  Ololopel (Olippas), VI, 710
  Omahas (Omahaws, Owaha), I, 498, 523; III, 609; IV, 573; V, 494; VI, 688, 705, 706
  Ommunise (Carp River Indians), I, 458
  Oneidas, I, 441; III, 583, 590, 594; IV, 603, 604, 606; V, 668, 705, 707; VI, 714, 718
    and Tuscaroras, VI, 275
    of Green Bay, VI, 688, 707

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Oneidas—Continued
    of New York, V, 504; VI, 688, 707
    of Wisconsin, V, 504
  Onondaga (Onondagoes), I, 441; III, 583, 590; IV, 603, 604, 606; V, 504, 668; VI, 275, 688, 705, 707, 714, 718
  Ootlashoot, III, 570
  Opelusa (Apalousa), III, 529, 531
  Oquaga (Aughquagas, Oquagos), V, 668; VI, 714
  Oraibi (Oriva), I, 519
  Oregon Indians, I, 436, 437, 521, 523; V, 484; VI, 688
  Oregon Territory tribes, V, 492–493; VI, 705
  Osages (Washbashas), III, 585, 594, 609; IV, 572, 590; V, 495; VI, 414, 540, 688, 689, 705, 712
  Oswegatches, VI, 714
  Oto (Otoes, Ottoes), I, 498, 523; III, 593; IV, 573; V, 494; VI, 688
    and Missourias, III, 609; VI, 705, 706
  Ottawas (Ottowas, Outtamacks), I, 478, 523; III, 583, 584, 591, 609, 610; IV, 572; V, 495; VI, 271, 272, 275, 688, 705, 714
    and Chippewas (Chepawas), III, 610; VI, 705, 714
    and others, VI, 714
    of Maumee (1812), V, 708
    of Michigan Peninsula (1812), V, 708
  Outtagomies and others, VI, 714
    See also Foxes.
  Outtamacks and others, VI, 714
    See also Ottawas.
  Pacific Coast tribes, V, 487–489
  Padoucas. *See* Comanche.
  Pahvant (Parant Utahs), VI, 697
  Pailsh. *See* Copalis.
  Paint Town, I, 508
  Paloos (Palooses, Palvas, Pelloatpallah band, Pelouses, Se wat palla), I, 521; III, 570, 632; V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 701
  Paluxies. *See* Biloxi.
  Parant Utahs. *See* Pahvant.
  Pascagoula, III, 585, 596

Population, by tribes—Continued
- Passamaquoddies, I, 524; III, 583; VI, 688
- Paviotso (Pi-Utahs), V, 201, 498
- Pawnee, I, 523; III, 479–480, 595, 609; IV, 573; V, 495; VI, 688, 705
- Pejodque Pueblo, VI, 688
- Pend d'Oreilles (Pond Orilles), III, 632; V, 490, 705, 706, 707
  - Lower, VI, 700
  - Upper, VI, 700
  - *See also* Kalispel.
- Pennacooks, V, 230
- Penn's Cove Indians, V, 705
- Penobscot, I, 524; III, 512, 583; VI, 688
- Penointik-ara, I, 522
- Peonies, III, 592
- People of the Lakes. *See* Mdewakanton.
- People of the Leaves. *See* Wahpetum.
- Peorias (Piorias), I, 523; IV, 572; VI, 688, 714
  - and Kaskaskias, III, 609, 610; V, 495
  - and others, VI, 705
- Pequots, VI, 117
- Piankashaw (Piankashas, Piankashaws, Piankeshaws, Pyankeshaws), I, 523; III, 585, 592, 610; IV, 572; VI, 272, 275, 688, 714
  - and others, V, 708; VI, 705
  - and Weas, III, 609; V, 495; VI, 275
- Picallipannish, [Puyallup?] I, 521
- Picuris (Picaris), I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
- Piegans, VI, 688, 698
- Pillagers, V, 185, 707
- Pillar Rock, and others, V, 705
- Pishquitpahs, III, 570, 609
- Pisquows (Pischoos, Piscahoose, Pisquouse), I, 521; VI, 702
  - and Okinakanes, V, 705; VI, 700
- Pist-chin, IV, 598
- Point St. Ignace, I, 458
- Pojoaque (Pogodque, Pojodque, Pojuaque), I, 519; III, 633; VI, 709
- Poncas (Puncahs), I, 523; III, 594, 609; IV, 573; VI, 556, 688, 705
- Ponderas, Squiaelps. *See* Kalispel.

Population, by tribes—Continued
- Port Orchard Indians. *See* Kalispel.
- Port Townsend Indians. *See* Chimakum.
- Potawatomi (Pattawatimas, Pottawatamies, Pottawatomies, Pottawattamies, Pottawattomies, Putawatimes), I, 488, 523; III, 584, 610; IV, 572; V, 495; VI, 271, 272, 275, 688, 705, 714
  - Strolling, VI, 707
  - of Chicago and Illinois (1812), V, 708
  - of Huron, VI, 705
  - of St. Joseph and the Huron (1812), V, 708
- Potoash, III, 571
- Priest's Rapids, V, 706
- Puans. *See* Winnebago.
- Pueblo, V, 484; VI, 705, 709
- Pueblo, of New Mexico, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688
- Puget's Sound Indians, IV, 598; V, 484
- Puyallup (Pualli-paw-mish, Pualliss, Pugallipamish, Puyallupamish, Puyyallopamish), IV, 598; V, 491, 701, 703, 704
- Quack-ena-mish (Quak-s'n-a-mish). *See* Squaxon.
- Quaitso (Quieetsos), III, 571
- Quanusee. *See* Murphy.
- Quapaw, (Quapas, Quappas), I, 498, 523; III, 585, 594, 609, 610; IV, 574, 495, 702; VI, 688, 705
- Quillequaquas, III, 632
- Quinaielt (Calasthocle, Quinailee, Quin-aitle, Quiniilts, Quenoil), I, 521; III, 571; V, 490, 703; VI, 703
- Quinnechart. *See* Makah.
- Red Wing's Village, I, 498
- Rees (Ricarees), *See* Arikara.
- Rock Island tribe, III, 632; V, 707; VI, 700
- Rogue River Indians, V, 493
- Rogues or Rascally, III, 201
- Root Diggers, V, 493
- Russian River region, III, 634; VI, 711
- Säaptins. *See* Nez Percés.
- Sackanoir. *See* Lakmiut.

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Sacramento Indians, III, 201
  Sacramento Valley Indians, VI, 688, 710
  Sacs [Sauk] and Foxes, I, 488, 523; V, 495; VI, 414, 705
  Sacs [Sauk] of Missouri, III, 609
  Sagennom band, III, 570
  Saginaw (Saganaws), I, 458; V, 708
  Sah-aptin, IV, 551
  Sahaptins, III, 632
  Sahewamish (Sa-heh-wa-mish of Say-hay-ma-mish, Sehehwamish), IV, 598; V, 703, 704; VI, 703
  St. John's Indians, III, 583
  St. Regis, I, 441; III, 583; IV, 603, 604, 607; V, 504; VI, 689, 705, 707
  Sa-ku-me-hu (Sock-a-muke), IV, 598; V, 704; VI, 703
  Salish, I, 521; V, 490; VI, 688, 701
  Samamish (Sah-ma-mish), IV, 598; V, 703; VI, 703
  Samish, V, 491, 704; VI, 703
  San Antonio de Padua, I, 520
  San Buenaventura, I, 520
  San Carlos de Monterey, I, 520
  Sandia, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
  San Diego, I, 520
  San Domingo, I, 519
  San Felipe, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688 709
  San Fernando, I, 520
  San Francisco mission, I, 520
  San Gabriel, I, 520
  San Ildefonso, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
  San Jose, I, 520
  San Juan, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
  San Juan Bautista, I, 520
  San Juan Capistrano, I, 520
  San Luis Obispo, I, 520
  San Luis Rey de Francia, I, 520
  San Miguel, I, 520
  Sanpoil (Hehighenimmo; Hihighenimmo, Linpoilish, Sempoiles, Senpoils), I, 521; III, 200 (map), 572, 609; V, 706; VI, 688, 701
  Sansarcs, V, 494
  Sans Puelles, V, 706
  Santa Ana I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688
  Santa Barbara, I, 520
Population, by tribes—Continued
  Santa Clara, I, 519, 520; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
  Santa Cruz, I, 520
  Santa Dominga, III, 633; VI, 688, 709
  Santana, VI, 709
  Santee (Isanyati), I, 248
  Saponi (Sapoones, Sapoonies), V, 688; VI, 714
  Satsika, IV, 560
  Sauk (Sacs), III, 259, 562, 593, 609; IV, 572; VI, 272
  Sauk and Fox, I, 488, 523; III, 584; V, 495; VI, 414, 705
  Saukeys [Sauk] and others, VI, 714
  Sa-wa-mish V, 703; VI, 703
  Schwo-Yelpi. *See* Colville.
  Sciota Valley, I, 73
  Sekani (Sicaunies), II, 28
  Semiahmoo (Birch Bay Indians, Shimiahmoo), V, 491, 704, 705; VI, 703
  Seminoles, I, 522, 524; III, 610; IV, 574, VI, 479, 688, 705
  Seminoles and others, III, 584, 597
  Senecas, I, 441; III, 583, 590, 609, 610; IV, 528, 574, 603, 604, 605, 606; V, 495, 505, 668; VI, 275, 705, 707, 714, 718
    and Shawnees, III, 609, 610; V, 495; VI, 705
    and Shawnees of Neosho, IV, 590
    of Alleghany, VI, 688
    of Buffalo, VI, 688
    of Cattaragus, VI, 688
    of Neosho, IV, 590
    of Sandusky, V, 708; VI, 705
    of Tonawanda, VI, 688
  Shahaka (Shahalah), III, 570, 609
  Shallattoos (Shal lat tos), III, 572; V, 706
  Shanwappom (Chan wap pan, Shamwappoms, III, 572; V, 706
  Shaste, III, 201
  Shawnees (Shawanese, Shawanoes, Shawnese), I, 441, 488, 518, 524; III, 583, 585, 591, 609, 610, 625; IV, 572, 574, 606; V, 495; VI, 271, 272, 275, 688, 699, 705, 714
  Shawnees and Delawares, VI, 708
  Shawnees of Ohio and Indiana (1812) V, 708

Population, by tribes—Continued
- Shinecocks, vi, 688
- Shipaulovi (Juparivi), i, 519
- Shobarboobeer, iii, 572
- Shokomish, v, 491, 703; vi, 703
- Sho-mam-ish (S'homamish), iv, 598; v, 703, 704; vi, 703
- Shoshoni (Shoshonee, Shoshonees, Shoshones, Shoshonies, Snake, Soshawnese), i, 199, 521, 522; iii, 570, 572, 597, 609; v, 493, 494, 498, 556; vi, 688, 689, 697, 701
- S'hotle-ma-mish (Sroo-tle-mamish), iv, 598; v, 703; vi, 703
- Shoto, iii, 570
- Sichomovi (Chemovi), i, 458
- Siksika, *See* Blackfeet.
- Silela (Shallala, Shallalah), iii, 571, 609; v, 706
- Silla, iii, 633
- Silla, Pueblo de, i, 519
- Sinamish of Whidley's Island, vi, 701
- Sioux, i, 524; iii, 594, 609, 614, 629, 631; v, 701; vi, 275, 276, 688, 707
  - and others (1812), v, 708
  - decline in, iii, 242
  - of the Mississippi, vi, 705
  - of the Missouri, vi, 705
  - of the Plains, vi, 705
- Sisseton (Sissitons), iii, 563
- Siuslaw (Sheastuckles), iii, 571
- Six Nations, vi, 718
- Skaddall (Skaddalls, Skaddals), iii, 572, 609; v, 706
- Skagit (Skadjets, Skagats, Skagets, Skagots), i, 521; iv, 598; v, 701, 704; vi, 688, 701, 703.
- S'ke-tehl-mish, v, 703; vi, 703
- Skihwamish (Skea-wa-mish, Skeysehamish, Skeywhamish, Skeywhomish, Sky-wha-mish), i, 521; iv, 598; v, 701, 704; vi, 688, 701, 703
- Skilloot (Caloait, Calooit), i, 521; iii, 571, 609; vi, 701
- Skitswish (Coeur d'Alenes, Cour d'Alenes, Cour d'Aliens, Skeetsomish, Sketsomish, Skitmish), iii, 572, 609, 632; v, 490, 705, 706, 707; vi, 700, 701
- Skokomish (Hokamish, Sko-skomish), iv, 598; v, 701; vi, 687
- Skomamish (Homamish, Homanish), i, 521; vi, 701
- Skope-ah-mish, v, 703; vi, 703
- Sk-tah-le-jum (Skuck-stan-a-jumps), iv, 598; v, 704; vi, 703
- Smackshop (Smakshop, Smockskop), iii, 570; v, 706
- Sma-leh-hu, v, 704; vi, 703
- Smulkamish (Smel-ka-mish), v, 703; vi, 703
- Snake Indians (Snakes). *See* Shoshoni.
- Snakes proper, v, 498
- Sno-ho-mish (Sinaahamish, Sinahamish, Sinahemish, Sinahomish, Sinnamish), i, 521; iv, 598; v, 701. 704; vi, 688, 703
- Snoqualmu (Snoqualamick, Snoqual-a-muk, Snoqualimich, Snoqualmick, Snoqualmook, i, 521; iv, 598; v, 704; vi, 689, 701, 703
- Snoquamish, i, 521; iv, 598; vi, 689, 701
- Sock-a-muke. *See* Sa-ku-me-hu.
- Socorro, vi, 689
- Socorro, Pueblo de, i, 519
- Sokulk (Lokulk), iii, 570, 609; v, 706
- Soledad, i, 520
- Sonoma Valley, iii, 634
- Soshawnese or Snake Indians. *See* Shoshoni.
- Souriquois (Souriquois of St. John). *See* Micmac.
- Sowans, vi, 556, 689
- Soyennow (Sagennom) band, iii, 570
- Spokan (Larlielo, Lartielo, Spokanes, Sinhumanish), i, 521; iii, 572, 609, 632; v, 707; vi, 700
- Spokanes, v, 490, 705, 706, 707; vi, 700, 701
- Squalli-ah-mish, vi, 703. *See* Nisqualli.
- Squa-na-mish, iv, 598
- Squannaroos (Squam a cross), iii, 572; v, 706
- Squaxon (Quck-ena-mish, Quaks'n-a-mish), iv, 598; v, 703; vi, 703
- Squaxon (Squaks'namish), v, 704
- Squiatl (Squai-aitl), v, 703; vi, 703
- Squi-na-mish, v, 704; vi, 703

Population, by tribes—Continued
- Sroo-tle-mam-ish, iv, 598
- Staitan (Marlain or Kite, Marlin or Kite), iii, 596, 609
- Staktamish (Staktomish). *See* Kwaiailk.
- Stehllums [Stehtlums], v, 491, 703; vi, 703
- Stehtsasamich (Steh-cha-sa-mish, Stitcheo-saw-mish, Turn Water), iv, 598; v, 703; vi, 703
- Steila-coom-a-mish (Steilacoomish), v, 491, 703; vi, 703
- Stilla-qua-mish (Stoluchwamish), iv, 598; v, 491, 704; vi 703
- St-ka-mish [Sekamish], v, 703; vi, 703
- Stockbridges, i, 488, 524; iii, 583; iv, 572; v, 495; vi, 689, 705, 707
- Stonington, iii, 583
- Sualtine. *See* Atfalati.
- Suchamier. *See* Lakmiut.
- Sugwaundugahwininewug (Bois Forte bands, Thick Woodsmen), ii, 139; vi, 692
- Suiaton and Wapaton Sioux, vi, 707
- Sumopavi, i, 519
- Suquamish (Soquamish), v, 700, 703, 704; vi, 703
- Suquamish and Toanda, v, 705
- Susquehannocks. *See* Conestoga.
- Swo-da-mish, v, 704; vi, 703
- Tacquimenon River Indians, i, 458
- Tacullies, ii, 28
- Tahwaccarros [Tawakoni] and others, vi, 708
- Taitinapam (Tai-tin-a-pam, Taitinapan, Tintinapain), v, 490, 703; vi, 703
- Tanoquevi. *See* Hano.
- Taos, iii, 633; vi, 689, 709
- Taos, Pueblo de, i, 519
- Taos Utahs, vi, 697
- Tawakoni (Tahwaccaros, Tah-wae-Carras, Tawacarros, Towacarros, Towoekonies), iii, 635; v, 712; vi, 689, 699, 705, 708
- Taw-nu-nuk's band, i, 498
- Tejon Reservations, vi, 715
- Tenpenny Utahs. *See* Timpaiavats.
- Tesuque, iii, 633; vi, 689, 709

Population, by tribes—Continued
- Tetons (Tetans), i, 524; iii, 563; v, 494; vi, 556, 689
- Texas, iii, 635
- Texas Indians, i, 518, 523; v, 483
- Texas tribes, southwestern, v, 702
- Thick Woodsmen. *See* Sugwaundugahwininewug.
- Thlingehadinne (Dog Ribs), ii, 27
- Tillamook (Hilleamuck, Kitamukes, Killamucks), i, 521; iii, 201, 571, 609, 632; v, 492; vi, 687, 701
- Timpaiavats (Tenpenny Utahs), vi, 697
- Tlakluit (Echeloot, Eskeloot, Telhuemit, Tilhualwits, Tilhulhwit), iii, 570, 609; v, 706; vi, 702
- Tlatskanai (Claskstar, Clatacamin, Clatsacamin, Clatsaconin), i, 521; iii, 570, 632; vi, 606, 687, 689, 701
- Toanda and Suquamish, v, 705
  - *See also* Twana.
- Töanhooch, v, 491, 703; vi, 703
- Tonawandas, vi, 689
- Tonkawas (Toncahiras, Tonkahiras), i, 518; iii, 635, 705; vi, 689, 708
- Totonic bands (Tototen, Tototins). *See* Tututni.
- Towacarros [Tawakoni], Keechies, and Wacoes, vi, 705
- T'qua-qua-mish, v, 703; vi, 703
- Trinity Indians, iii, 634
- Troy Indians, iii, 583
- Tsillawadoot, ii, 28. *See* Etcheridiegottine.
- Tuahno, i, 521
- Tuanoh, v, 701
- Tulareños (Tula or Tulara), iii, 201
- Tum Waters. *See* Clowwewalla.
- Turn Water. *See* Stehtsasamich.
- Tuscaroras, i, 444; iii, 583; iv, 603, 604, 606; v, 504, 668; vi, 689, 705, 707, 714, 718
- Tushepaw (Tushepah, Tushshepahs), iii, 572, 609; v, 706
- Tuthkuthkutchin (Deagothee Loochoo), ii, 28
- Tututni (Totonic bands, Tototen, Tototins), v, 492, 493; vi, 689, 702

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Twana (Toanda, Töanhooch, Twanoh, Wood's Canal, Tu-a-nooch, Tucanoh), IV, 598; V, 491; VI, 689, 701, 703
  Twightwees. *See* Miami.
  Uchees. *See* Yuchi.
  Uinta (Ewinte, Uwinty Utahs), V, 498; VI, 697
  Ulseahs. *See* Alsea.
  Umatilla (Utillas), V, 493
  Umpquas. *See* Kuitsh.
  Upper Chinooks, V, 703, 706
  Upper Creeks, V, 483
  Upper Platte Agency, VI, 713
  Upper Qualla Towns, I, 508
  Upsarokas. *See* Crows.
  Utah Territory tribes, I, 522; V, 498; VI, 705
  Utchees. *See* Yuchi.
  Ute (Eutahs of New Mexico, Utah Indians, Utahs), I, 519, 522; IV, 596; V, 484, 485, 498; VI, 689, 697, 705
  Uwinty Utahs. *See* Uinta.
  Vancouvers. *See* Klikitat.
  Village of the Cross, I, 478
  Wachucknas. *See* Michopdo.
  Waco (Wacoes, Wacos, Waecoes, Whacoes), I, 240, 518; III, 635; V, 712; VI, 689, 699
    and others, VI, 708
    Keechies, and Towacarros, VI, 705
  Wahkiacums, III, 571, 609
  Wahowpum (Wah how pum), III, 570, 609; V, 706
  Wahpetun (People of the Leaves), III, 563
  Waishkee's Bay, I, 458
  Waitlatpu, V, 706
    See also Cayuse.
  Wakanasisi (Wakanascecies), I, 521
  Walla wallas (Wallawollah, Wollah wollah, Wollawollah), I, 521; III, 507, 609, 632; V, 490, 493, 705, 706, 707; VI, 700, 701
  Wandering tribes, VI, 705
  Wappatoo. *See* Atfalati.
  Wasco (Wascopams, Wascopan, Wascopaws, Wascos), I, 521; III, 632; V, 493; VI, 701
  Washbashas. *See* Osage.

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Washington Territory (Indians), V, 490–491, 703–707
  Washington Territory tribes, VI, 689, 705
  Watlala (Cascades), III, 632; V, 490, 493, 705, 706; VI, 700, 701
  Waulatpus. *See* Cayuse.
  Wayondotts [Huron] and others, VI, 714
  Weas, I, 488, 524; III, 585, 592, 609, 610; IV, 572; VI, 272
    and others, V, 708; VI, 705
    and Piankashaws, VI, 275
  Wheelappas. *See* Willopah.
  Wheelpo. *See* Colville.
  Whistanatin. *See* Khwaishtunnetunne
  Wiam (Wyampam), I, 521; VI, 702
  Wichitas (Witchetaws, Witchitas), I, 518; III, 635; V, 712; VI, 689, 705
    and others, VI, 708
  Wild mountain tribes, I, 520
  Willamette Indians, I, 521; VI, 701
    See also Clowewalla.
  Willetpos. *See* Cayuse.
  Willewah (Grande Ronde), III, 570; V, 706
  Willopah (Wheelappas), III, 632
  Winnebago (Puans, Winnebagoes), I, 498; III, 282–283, 562, 584, 593, 609, 610; IV, 228; VI, 271, 272, 689, 704, 705, 707
    western Michigan (1812), V, 708
  Wiyondotts and others, VI, 714
    See also Huron.
  Wiyot (Wee-yot), III, 127
  Wolf Town, I, 508
  Wyampam. *See* Wiam.
  Wyandots. *See* Huron.
  Wyandots of Ohio and Michigan (1812), V, 708
  Yacaws. *See* Makah.
  Yahach (Youitts), III, 571
  Yahshute. *See* Chemetunne.
  Yakima (Cutsahnim, Cutsanim, Yacaaws, Yacamas, Yackaws, Yackimas, Yakama, Yakamas), I, 521; III, 572, 609, 632; V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 700, 702
  Yam Hill Indians, I, 521; VI, 689, 701

Population, by tribes—Continued
  Yampapas, vi, 697
  Yankton (Ihanktonwan, Yanctonas, Yanctons, Yanctonwas, Yanktons), i, 249; iii, 563; vi, 556, 689
  Yankton Sioux, v, 494
  Yankton, Teton, and Cheyenne Sioux, vi, 707
  Yanktonas [Yanktonai], v, 494
  Yaquina (Youikcones), iii, 571
  Yatasi (Yaltasse, Yattapo), iii, 585, 596
  Yeletpo band. *See* Cayuse.
  Yuchi (Uchees, Utchees), i, 522; vi, 689
  Yukichetunne (Euquachee, Yuquache), v, 493; vi, 702
  Yuma (Umahs), i, 519
  Yumpatick-ara, i, 522
  Yupu (Yubas), vi, 710
  Yutas, i, 244, 245
    Grande Uinta River, vi, 689
    Southern, vi, 689
    See also Ute.
  Zuñi, i, 519; iii, 633; v, 484; vi, 689, 709
  Population. *See also* Census; Depopulation; and under names of Missions, Reservations, States, Territories, and Tribal names.
Population, United States, according to States, ii, 607; iv, 610
  and statistics, i, 433–437; v, 479–486
  white, New England in 1673, vi, 152
Porcupine Mountains, illustration showing, iv, 187
Port Discovery Indians, population, v, 490; vi, 703
Port Discovery, tribe at, vi, 703
Port Orchard Indians, population, v, 705
Port Orford Agency, census report, vi, 702
Port Orford, tribes, vi, 702
Port Stuart Indians, v, 489
  census, v, 489
  language, v, 489
Port Townsend Indians, population, v, 491, 705
Port Townsend, tribe located at, vi, 703
Porter, P. B., iii, 282; vi, 376
  information from, iii, 587–588, 590–598
Poscopsahe, a Mandan chief, iii, 249
Posey, Col., charge against Creeks, vi, 319
Potanon, vi, 74
Potato, brief history, vi, 617
  reference to discovery, vi, 562
  wild, of the Navajo, iv, 212
    used by Bonaks, iv, 222
  See also Dacotah potato.
Potawatamies. *See* Potawatomies.
Potawatomies (Pattawatimas, Potawatamies, Potowatomies, Pottawatamies, Pottawatomies, Pottawattamies, Pottawattomies, Pottawottomies, Pottowattomies), iii, 277, 278; vi, 237, 452
  alliance with Menomonie, i, 304
  annuities, ii, 587, 588, 589
  appropriations for, ii, 564
  armistice granted to, vi, 364
  at Braddock's defeat, vi, 217, 218
  brief account of, iii, 560
  census, iii, 621–628
  Chicago garrison massacred by, vi, 359
  chief, vi, 386
  classification, ii, 36; iii, 401
  cranial capacity, v, 244
    measurements, ii, 335
  creation myth, i, 320
  Detroit, warriors, vi, 271
  fiscal statistics relating to, vi, 720, 721, 722, 723
  funds required for, ii, 572–573
  general condition, iv, 466–467; vi, 547–548
  Huron, census of, i, 488–497
    location, vi, 705
    population, vi, 692, 705
    statistics, vi, 721, 723
  Indiana, treaty with, v, 499
  investments for, ii, 561
  lands, iv, 572
    ceded by, ii, 602, 603, 604; vi, 393–395, 445, 505
    claimed, iii, 584
    disposal of, vi, 554
    purchased from, ii, 593, 595, 598, 599, 600, 601
    statistics on, ii, 605, 606

Potawatomies—Continued
  league with other tribes, VI, 485
  letters from country of, I, 157–158
  location, III, 584, 591; IV, 461; V, 495; VI, 33, 275, 385, 705
    maps showing, III, 96; IV, 180; VI, 519
  members of Pontiac's Confederacy, II, 242, 307; VI, 243
  missionary work among, V, 699; VI, 734, 735, 738, 740
  name, meaning of, I, 308; V, 40, 145
    synonomy, V, 41, 192
  not an independent tribe, V, 40
  peace sought by, VI, 343
  picture writing, I, 338
  population, I, 523; III, 584, 591, 610; IV, 572; V, 495, 708; VI, 271, 272, 275, 688, 692, 693, 707
  Prairie, population, VI, 693
    treaty with, V, 499
  religious beliefs, I, 320
  removal, IV, 485; V, 495; VI, 497, 505–506, 516
  St. Joseph, population, VI, 693
    warriors, VI, 271
  Strolling, population, VI, 707
  tin in country, I, 157–158
  treaties with, V, 499; VI, 255, 330, 334, 380, 421, 458
  Wabash, population, VI, 693
    treaty with, V, 499
  warriors, estimate of, III, 560; VI, 271
  West, census of, I, 488–497
  westward movement, V, 192; VI, 488
  See also Pauteauamis; Pedadumies; Po-da-wand-um-ee; Poux; Powtawatamis; Putawatimes.
Potawatomi language. *See* Pottawatomie language.
Potico, Mr., Hurons guided by, II, 242
Potier, Father, II, 266
  mediations, II, 264
Potoashs, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
Potomac River region Indians, V, 35–36
Potomac tribes, amulet worn by, I, 94
  artifacts, illustrated, I, 80
Potosi, mentioned, IV, 278, 279, 322, 324
Potowatomies. *See* Potawatomies.
Po-to-yan-te tribe, origin myth, IV, 224–225
Pots, basketry, I, 211
  stone, I, 211
  See also Pottery.
Potsherds, illustration, VI, 630
  villages located by, III, 76
Pottawatamies, Pottawatomies, Pottawattamies, Pottawattomies, Pottawottomies, Pottowattomies. *See* Potawatomies.
Pottawatomie (Pottawattomie) language, a distinct dialect, II, 358
  Algonquin dialect, II, 341, 358
  list of publications in, IV, 539
Pottawattamie, Kanzas, mission at, V, 503
Potter, occupation of, III, 81
Potter, Mr., cited on Pennacooks, V, 217
Potter's wheel, antiquity, IV, 139
  discovered in Georgia, III, 79
  lack of evidence of, VI, 611
Pottery, I, 81–82; III, 84
  aboriginal, brief account, IV, 663
  aboriginal periods indicated by, IV, 139–140
  Algonquin, I, 81–82
  ancient, quality, IV, 140
  antique, III, 75–82
    Aztec, VI, 589
    Mexican, VI, 580, 588–589
  area covered by fragments, IV, 140
  Casa Grande, III, 300, 302, 305
  ceremonial, from Florida, I, 94
  coiled, Creek, V, 692
  Congaree, description, IV, 161–168
  connection with corn, I, 61
  cooking pot or *akeek*, I, 81
  decline in use, IV, 122
  Florida, III, 79–80
    ceremonial, I, 94
    coasts of, III, 75–82
    illustrations, III, 80
    quality, III, 82
  from burials, I, 84
  from coast of Georgia, III, 75–82
  from South Carolina, II, 89
  from the Gila, illustrated, VI, 69
  lack of glazing in, IV, 139–140
  Lake Superior, quality, III, 82
  making of, by women, I, 81
  Mexican and Peruvian hand-made, IV, 139
  migration traced by, III, 76
  Moquis, III, 299

Pottery—Continued
  mortuary, I, 83–84; IV, 161
    illustrated, I, 85
  Peruvian, described, IV, 438
  Pueblo, illustrated, IV, 435
    two eras shown in, IV, 435
  punctured when buried, I, 84; III, 77
  Rio Gila, described, III, 83–85
    illustrated, III, 83
  rude ancient, found in Missouri, III, 274–275
  See also Pots.
Pottowattomies. *See* Potawatomies.
Poughkeepsie, ancient name of, III, 530
  derivation of name, IV, 379
Poux (Pous), a name for the Pottawattomies, V, 41, 192
  at the siege of Detroit, II, 242, 243, 247, 248, 252, 258, 259, 274, 275, 279, 281, 283, 293, 295, 296, 297, 301, 302
  great council at village of, II, 248
  See also Potawatomies.
Powel, Col., garrison commanded by, at Niagara, III, 334
Powhatan (Powhattan), I, 72; III, 57; IV, 613
  character, VI, 97, 98
  death, VI, 744
  policy toward settlers, VI, 97
  real position, IV, 481
  wars of brothers, VI, 89
Powhatan Confederacy, estimated population, V, 36
  location of tribes, VI, 83
  See also Powhatanic tribes.
Powhatan Indians (Powhattans, Powhattanese), V, 122
  classification, III, 401
  dress of women, III, 65
  reference to language, II, 36; III, 96
Powhatanic tribes, account of, VI, 85–88
  confederacy, VI, 83
  extinction, V, 481
  See also Powhatan Confederacy.
Powhattanese, Powhattans. *See* Powhatan Indians.
Powrys of Brazil, stature, II, 318
Powtewatamis, country occupied, III, 559
  warriors, estimate of, III, 556, 559
  See also Potawatomi.
Pow-wows, hunting charms, V, 76
  name of Algonquin priests, VI, 109
  use of charmed medicines, V, 76
Prairie du Chien, treaty made at, VI. 421–422
Prairie fires, effect, I, 270; II, 128, 173
Prairie Indians, a name for the Kickapoos and Miscotins, V, 41
Prairie Minnetarees, mentioned, VI, 686
Prairie tribes, color, VI, 573
  customs, II, 70, 71
  physical powers, III, 213
Pratt, Senator, of Maryland, Indian legislation discussed by, V, 469, 470–471
Prayer, Caddo form of, V, 685
  nature of, among Indians, III, 226, 237
  See also Lord's Prayer.
Prayer-stick, use of the term, I, 355
Praying Indians, community, V, 225
  first settlement, VI, 107
  origin of name, VI, 152
Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, mentioned, III, 256, 259
Presbyterian Church, missions established, V, 502; VI, 739
  plea for aid to mission, VI, 548
  work among Choctaws, VI, 524
Prescott, Miss, IV, 511
Prescott, P., Sioux census revised by, V, 701–702
Prescott, Philander, Dacotahs discussed by, II, 168–199; III, 225–246; IV, 59–72
  qualifications, II, 168
  sacrifice described by, IV, 51
  vocabulary by, II, 206
Presque Isle, battle at, with Indians, VI, 340
  capture of, II, 286
  change of garrison, VI, 344
  Washington's mission to, VI, 213–214
Press made of basketry, described, IV, 445–446
Pretty Woman Town, census of, I, 508–517
Prideaux, Gen., Niagara besieged by, VI, 234
Priesthood, Spanish, fraud practiced by, V, 93

Priests or jugglers, fear of, II, 196
  functions, IV, 640
  harm done by, IV, 637
  office of, among the Dacotas, II, 198–199
  power, II, 184
  status among Creeks, I, 277
  See also Medicine-man; Prophet.
Priest's Rapids, population, V, 706
Primary Band of Sault Ste. Marie, census of, I, 458–467
"Prince," Indian, use of title by early writers, III, 41
Pring, Capt., mention of voyage of, VI, 96
Pringle, John, illustration showing hair of, III, 377
Printed Hearts. *See* Conerd Helene.
Prior, Indian population estimated by, V, 484
Prisoners. *See* Captives.
Pritchard, cited, VI, 614
Proctor, Col. Thomas, peace mission of, V, 668
Proctor, Gen., at battle of the Thames, VI, 357
  flight from Amhertsburg, VI, 363
  pursuit and defeat of, VI, 363
Propagation of Christian knowledge, Hon. Society in Scotland for, work of, VI, 734, 735, 736
Property, buried with the dead, I, 355; II, 68
  descent of, among the Dacotas, II, 194
  offerings of, V, 168–169
Property rights, California and Oregon Indians, III, 210
  Comanches, I, 232
  Creeks, I, 282–283
  Dacotas, II, 193–194
  lack of interest in, I, 207
Prophet, The. *See* Elskatawa.
Prophets, activities, IV, 495
  Chippewa, V, 189
  office of, I, 359, 388–389, 414
  rise to power, I, 114
  secret society of, V, 71
  See also Jossakeed.
Prostitution, punishment for, V, 654
Protestant Episcopal Board of Missions, work among Indians, V, 502
Protestant Episcopal Church of the U. S., missions, VI, 737
Puallis (Pualli-paw-mish) Indians, language, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598
  population, IV, 598
  See also Puyallupamish.
Puan Bay, tribes living about, VI, 714
Puanis (Puants) French names for Winnebagoes, III, 277; VI, 271
Puans (Puants), III, 556
  country occupied, III, 559
  population, VI, 272
  totems, III, 556
  warriors, estimate of, III, 556, 559
  See also Winnebagoes.
Puaray. *See* Tigouex.
Puberty customs, VI, 633–634, 664
  Chippewa, I, 391
  fasts, object of, V, 196
  Ojibwa, II, 138
Puberty dance, of California tribes, V, 215
Public lands, statements regarding, II, 590–592
Public square. *See* Squares.
Puckagama, Falls of, named by the Chippewas, I, 142
Puebla, State of, antiquities, VI, 582
Pueblo Indians, VI, 688
  burial customs, IV, 78
  called "civilized tribes," I, 245
  costumes, IV, 76–77
  country occupied, VI, 705
  domestic arts, IV, 76
  dwellings, IV, 76, 82
  feature of vocabulary, III, 406
  government, IV, 76
  higher civilization, IV, 216
  languages, V, 689
  map showing location, II, 28
  missionary work among, V, 503; VI, 734, 740
  numeration, III, 457–459
  population, I, 519; III, 633; V, 484; VI, 688, 705, 709
  recommendations concerning, II, 556
  revolt against Spaniards, V, 206
  settlements, IV, 216
  spinning and weaving, illustrated, VI, 71
  supposed origin, IV, 77
  weaving, illustrated, IV, 436; VI, 71

Pueblo (Tusuque, Zuñi) language, numerals of, IV, 429–431
vocabulary, III, 446–459
Pugasainjigun, mentioned, v, 185
Puget Sound Indians, and Chihalis, population, v, 705
census, v, 704
description, IV, 600–601
list of, IV, 598
population, v, 484
report on, IV, 598–602
Pujari, an upper California language, III, 402
Pulairih, listed as a linguistic family, III, 402
Puncahs. *See* Puncas.
Puncapaugs, affiliations, VI, 150
Puncas (Puncahs), classification, III, 402
lands, IV, 573
population, IV, 573
See also Poncas.
Punishment, among Comanches, II, 130, 132
among Creeks, I, 276; v, 281–282
among Navajoes, IV, 211
among Oregon Indians, v, 653
attitude toward certain forms of, IV, 482
capital, among Creeks, I, 276
double, discussion, IV, 471
for depredations, discussed, IV, 474
for murder, I, 277
of children, II, 196; v, 273–274
See also Retaliation; Vengeance.
Punkapog, Indians at, I, 287
Purchas, extract from writings, IV, 454
Purification, necessary for ceremonies, v, 170
rites, v, 423–424
Puritans, arrival in America, VI, 178
See also Pilgrims.
Pushmataha, a Choctaw district, IV, 582
Putawatimes (Putawatimies), dwelling grounds, VI, 714
hunting grounds, VI, 714
missionary labors among, v, 698
population, VI, 714
warriors, estimate of, III, 556
See also Potawatomies.
Putnam, Gen., VI, 602
Putnam, Gen. Rufus, IV, 131
Puyallup. *See* Puallis; Puyallupamish.
Puyallup River, Indians on, VI, 703
Puyallupamish (Pugallipamish, Puyallopamish), brief account of, v, 701
census, v, 704
location, v, 491, 703; VI, 703
population, v, 491, 703; VI, 703
See also Puallis.
Pyankeshaws and others, dwelling grounds, VI, 714
hunting grounds, VI, 714
population, VI, 714
See also Piankashaws.
Pyesa, father of Black Hawk, VI, 447
Pygmies, II, 318
conclusion concerning, II, 319
Pyramids, American form, v, 29
of Mexico, VI, 583–584
probable development, I, 342
Pyrlaeus, missionary, v, 680

Q

Qiquate, reached by De Soto, VI, 66
Qpquive. *See* Opquive.
Quack-ena-mish, location, IV, 598
population, IV, 598
Quacolth, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
census v, 488
Quacolth language, tribes speaking, v, 488
Quaghtagies, reference to, VI, 232
Quahtoma (Quahtomah, Quakouwahs, Quatomah, Quatouwahs), census of, v, 492
location, VI, 702
maps showing, III, 96, 200
population, VI, 702
See also Saquaacha.
Qua i nu, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
census, v, 488
Quaitso. *See* Quieetsos.
Quakouwahs. *See* Quahtoma.
Quak-s'n-a-mish. *See* Quash-sua-mish.
Qualla Towns, Upper, census of, I, 508–517
Qualliamish (Quallyamish) VI, 688
population, I, 521; VI, 688
See also Nisqually; Squalliamish.
Quallyamish. *See* Qualliamish.

Qua ne, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census, v, 488
Quapas. *See* Quapaws.
Quapaws (Quapas, Quappas, Quppas), vi, 423, 522
  affiliations, iv, 550
  allies of the French, vi, 237
  and Senecas, acres owned, vi, 519
  annuities, ii, 585
  attacked by De Soto, iii, 48
  census, i, 498–507
  classification, iii, 402; iv, 321
  condition after removal, vi, 538
    general, iv, 472
  descendants of Rapahas, iv, 591
  De Soto in the range of, ii, 35
  encountered by De Soto, ii, 37
  funds required for, ii, 573
  indigenous to Kansas, v, 495; vi, 536
  in the Dacota group, ii, 37
  intrusion on territory of, iv, 485
  Kapahas identical with, iv, 310
  lands, iv, 574
    acquired, vi, 480
    ceded, ii, 604
    claims sold, iii, 585
    granted permanently to, v, 457
    purchased from, ii, 595, 598, 599, 600
    relinquished by, vi, 455
    statistics on, ii, 606
  linguistic affinities, i, 248
  location, i, 498; iii, 585, 594; iv, 461; v, 495; vi, 705
    maps showing, iii, 96; iv, 180; vi, 519
  migration tradition, v, 98
  of Siouan stock, i, 197
  opposition to schools, iv, 478
  population, i, 523; iii, 585, 594, 609, 610; iv, 574; v, 495, 702; vi, 688 705
  removal, vi, 516
    condition after, vi, 538
  report on condition of, iv, 591–592
  treaty with, v, 499; vi, 410, 458, 461
  See also Arkansas; Kapahas.
Quappas. *See* Quapaws.
Quarrelers or Loo-choos (Loucheux), classification, iii, 401; v, 172
  language, ii, 27; iii, 542
Quarries, Indian, pipe material, iv, 142–143
  See also Mines.
Quartz, mill for grinding, v, 112
Quash-sua-mish (Quak-s'n-a-mish), language, iv, 600
  location, v, 703; vi, 703
  population, v, 703; vi, 703
  See also Squahsinawmish.
Quas sad harjo, a Creek chief, iv, 576
Quathlapohtle, location, iii, 571
  population, iii, 571
Quatomah. *See* Quahtoma.
Quatouwahs. *See* Quahtoma.
Quat si nu, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 489
  census, v, 489
Quebec, origin of name, v, 40; vi, 235–236
Quee ah, census of, v, 489
  language, v, 489
  location, v, 489
Quee he Qna colt, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census, v, 488
Queen Catharine. *See* Montour, Catharine.
Queen Charlotte's Islands, census of Indians, v, 489
  language, v, 489
  tribes, v, 689
Queen Charlotte Sound, census of tribes, v, 488–489
  Indian names of tribes, v, 488–489
  language of tribes, v, 488
  tribes, v, 488–489
Queen Esther, an account of, v, 671–672
  confused with Catharine Montour, v, 670, 671, 672
  death, v, 673
Queniolts (Quenoil), included with Chinooks, vi, 686
  population, i, 521
Quenoil. *See* Queniolts.
Querchos. *See* Querechos.
Querechos (Querchos, Querehos), vi, 72
  encountered by Coronado's expedition, iv, 36
  map showing location of, iv, 39
  met by Coronado, iv, 30
  nomadic life, iv, 30
  probable identity, iv, 30, 35
Querehos. *See* Querechos.

Quesada, Don Juan de, Governor of St. Augustine, v, 261
Quetzalcoatl, I, 13, 18, 19, 22; v, 102
  benign influence, v, 105
  derivation of name, v, 105
  Mexican empire begun under, I, 22
  not Aztec, but Toltec, I, 21
  worship of, VI, 640–641
Que-we-san-sish, II, 165
Qui a han less, census of, v, 489
  language, v, 489
Quick sut i nut, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census, v, 488
Quieetsos, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
Quie ha Ne cub ta, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census, v, 488
Quigalta. *See* Chigantalgi; Quigualtangi.
Quigaltangi (Quigualtanji), fire-worship practiced, IV, 123
  identity, III, 49; v, 63
  sun worship, v, 63
Quigaute. *See* Quiguate.
Quigualtanji. *See* Quigualtangi.
Quiguate, a village on De Soto's march, III, 50
  departure of De Soto from, IV, 320, 321
Quilleoueoquas (Quillequaquas), map showing location, III, 200
  population, III, 632
  See also Ouillequegaws.
Quimare mission, Barcelona Province, IV, 556
Quinaielt. *See* Calasthocle; Queniolts; Quinaitle.
Quinaitle (Quinailee, Quinilts), location, III, 571; v, 490, 703; VI, 703
  population, III, 571; v, 490, 703; VI, 703
Quinalee. *See* Quinaitle.
Quiniilts. *See* Quinaitle.
Quinipiac, cranial measurements, II, 335
Quinnechart nation, location, III, 571
  population, III, 571
Quinney, John, translation by, IV, 539
Quinnipiac. *See* Quinipiac.
Quipana (Quipano), a name for the Pawnee, III, 50
  De Soto in country of, VI, 67
  identified as Pawnees, IV, 310
  See also Pawnee.
Quires (Quirix) province, identification, IV, 39
  map showing location, IV, 39
  party sent to, IV, 29
  pueblos composing, IV, 35
Quivera (Gran Quivera; Grand Quivera), v, 107
  expedition to, IV, 28–31
  location, IV, 30, 37
  ruins, IV, 37; v, 208
Quivers, illustrations, III, 69
  materials used for, III, 69
Quoratem, III, 147
  population, III, 151
Quoratem language, extent of, III, 151
Quppas. *See* Quapaws.

R

Rabbit, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Rabbit feast, a religious ceremonial, IV, 78
Rabbit hunt, community, IV, 78
Races of mankind, classification, IV, 355–357
  variations in, IV, 360–365
  See also Mankind.
Racing. *See* Runners.
Rafn, Mr. (Professor), I, 107
  inscription identified by, VI, 610
Rafts, made of bulrushes, III, 218
  made of tulé, III, 107
  Shoshonee, described, I, 214
  See also Balza.
Railroad expedition, progress, IV, 181
Rain, belief concerning, IV, 91
  dance for, Moqui, IV, 83–85
Rainy Lake, tribes on, VI, 33
Rakawana, use of the term, III, 62
Raleigh, Sir Walter, II, 22
  expedition organized by, VI, 82–84
  tobacco introduced by, into England, I, 72; v, 65
  trial and death, VI, 95
Ramsey, Gov., peace preserved by, II, 548

Rand, Rev. S. T., Lord's Prayer by, in Milicete language, v, 592
  Micmac vocabulary, v, 578
  vocabulary of numerals, v, 691
Rank, among tribes, II, 170; v, 136
  See also Caste.
Rappahannock, discussion of name, VI, 177
Raritans, a division of the Lenno Lenapees, VI, 147
Rascally. *See* Rogues.
"Rascals," a name for the Crows, VI, 686
Rask, Prof., v, 34
Rasle, Sebastian, VI, 156, 734
  death, VI, 175
  work among Abinakies, VI, 174–175
Rasselman, Ludwig, IV, 341
Rastra, or quartz mill, recovery of, v, 112
Rattles, description, IV, 71
  illustrations, II, 514
  used at dances, IV, 74
  used in curing the sick, II, 179, 180
Rattlesnake, belief concerning, IV, 238
Rauch, Christian Henry, missionary work of, v, 680–681
Raumbault, Charles, explorations, v, 647
Rawlinson, Maj. H. C., mention of work, I, 428
Ray, Capt., I, 25
Rèaume, J., III, 366, 367
Recollects (or Reformed Franciscans) missionary work, VI, 734
Recollect Rapids, naming of, VI, 648
Recording, Indian method of, II, 222–228
  See also Inscriptions.
Red and Missouri Rivers, Indian lands between, v, 501
Red Cap, an Oppegach chief, described, III, 149
Red-headed Magician, story of, I, 323
Red Jacket, III, 22, 57; IV, 345, 563; v, 411; VI, 647
  at Canandaigua council, VI, 326
  information furnished by, v, 669
  oratory of, III, 198; v, 518
  portrait of, III, 198; VI, 377
  reference to speech, v, 667
  reminiscences of, v, 669
  stature, IV, 350
Redman and Case, I, 173
Red River, tribes on, VI, 556
Red Rock, aims of mission at, v, 697
Red Sticks, use of term, VI, 376
Red Stone Old Fort, account, III, 340
Red towns, Creek, governed by warriors, v, 279
Redwing's band (Red Wing band), a Medawakanton band, III, 613
  listed as one of Seven Fires, II, 169
Red Wing's Village, census of, I, 498–507
  missionaries at, v, 697
Redwood forest, described, III, 124
Rees. *See* Aricaree; Ricarees.
Rees, James R., communication by, III, 97
  specimens from, v, 668
Rees, Thomas, reference to, v, 668
Rehoboth, R. I., burned by Indians, VI, 164
Reindeer, value to the Indian, I, 188
Reincarnation, belief in, III, 113
  of medicine-men, IV, 646
Rek-qua, a Klamath River tribe, III, 634
  a village on Klamath River, III, 138
Rekwoi. *See* Rek-qua.
Relationship, degrees of, among Dacotah, III, 234
  strength of ties, III, 210
  terms, I, 265, 268; II, 50; III, 360
Religion, connection of mounds with, I, 61–62, 72
  defense of, IV, 639–640
  Hindu, discussed, I, 36, 37; v, 57–58
  Indian, likened to Oriental, v, 30–31
  influence of, on Indian, v, 132
  lack of, among Yumas, II, 117
  of New England Indians, VI, 105–108
  of North American tribes, I, 15–16, 31–32, 34–35, 38, 412–413; IV, 635–651; v, 70–79, 401–411; VI, 592–594, 626–630
  secrecy regarding, v, 178, 401
  Toltec, compared with northern tribes, I, 72
  use of natural features in, I, 50
  worship of elements I, 38, 72
  See also Fire Worship; Mythology; Religious beliefs; Religious rites; Sun Worship.

Religious beliefs, acts of worship based on, v, 393
  Algonquins, I, 72
  Athapascans, v, 178
  California Indians, IV, 407
  Clear Lake Indians, III, 107–108
  Comanches I, 237; II, 127; v, 684–685
  Creeks, v, 269–270
  Dacotas, II, 197–198; III, 225–231
  difficulties in investigation of, v, 401–402
  Mandans, III, 248
  Massachusetts Indians, I, 286
  Mississippi Valley tribes, VI, 647–657
  Moquis, IV, 85
  Ojibwas, II, 135–136
  Virginia Indians, VI, 106
  See also Beliefs; Deity; Gods; Immortality; Reincarnation; Religion; Resurrection; Sacred fire; Soul; Spirits; Transmigration.
Religious rites, Algonquin, I, 72
  Ojibwa, II, 138
  See also Ceremonies; Dances; Sacrifice.
Remains, ancient animal, on the Columbia, I, 221
  archeological, in South Carolina, II, 88–89
  fossil, of the American race, II, 319–320
  human, with extinct animal, II, 319
  See also Antiquities; Mounds; Ossuaries; Ruins.
Remedies. *See* Medical practices.
Removal of tribes, Act authorizing, VI, 430–431
  advantages of, VI, 432–436
  character of land used, VI, 426
  conditions after, VI, 516, 554–558
  conditions prior to, VI, 518
  consummation of, VI, 482–485
  difficulties with southern tribes, VI, 466
  discussion of question, VI, 406–425, 437–446
  plans for, III, 573–580; IV, 259–260; v, 450–451; VI, 406–415
  Shawnee attitude toward, IV, 260
  See also Colonization of tribes; Colonized tribes.
Renville, Joseph, Sr., work, IV, 548, 549
Renville, Mr., Dakotah translations made by, v, 696
Renwick, Prof., IV, 138
Reproduction, causes affecting, VI, 564–567
  See also Birthrate.
Reservations, difficulties in selection, III, 167, 171–172
  discussion of policy regarding, VI, 458–459
  Eel River, selection, III, 130
  emigration through, IV, 468
  for tribes of Shasté language, III, 171
  in New York, census of, VI, 690
  Iroquois, described, II, 538–542
  Iroquois placed on, VI, 325
  on Klamath River, treaty concerning, III, 145
  plans for, on Trinity River, III, 151
  suggestions regarding, IV, 185
  See also Colonization of tribes.
Reserves, Indian, legislation concerning, in New Brunswick, v, 678–680
Restegauche, a Micmac settlement, v, 677
Resurrection of the dead, belief in, v, 104
  See also Immortality.
Retaliation, among the Dacota, II, 197
  law of, II, 184–185
  practice of, I, 262–263
  See also Punishment; Revenge; Vengeance.
Revenge, among the Sioux, II, 171
  story illustrating, III, 246
Revolution, American, history of tribes during, VI, 274–319
Reynards, a synonym of Foxes, v, 41; VI, 688
Rhagenratka (Rhagenuatka), a name for the Neutral Nation (Neuters), IV, 204, 208
Rhode Island, former name, VI, 125
  Indian lands in, III, 583, 586; v, 480
  Indian population, III, 583, 586; v, 480
  Narragansett name for, III, 532
  population and area, IV, 610
  sale of, by Narragansetts, VI, 125

Rhyme, lack of appreciation of, II, 455
Ribault, John, death, VI, 77, 744
  Fort Charles built by, VI, 743
  second voyage, VI, 76–77, 744
  voyage, VI, 73–74
Ricarees (Rickarees, Rees), cranial measurements, II, 335
  population, VI, 688
  shape of skulls, II, 317
  See also Aricaree.
Rice. *See* Wild rice.
Rice Lake region, Indians, V, 145
Richardville, John B., English name of Peshkewah, V, 528
Richibucto Indians, land granted to, V, 678
  warlike nature, V, 677
Rickarees. *See* Ricarees.
Ridge, John, reference to murder of, VI, 513
Ridge, Maj., VI, 467
  Cherokee party headed by, VI, 467, 475, 476
Ridges, father and son, murder of, VI, 500, 501
Riggs, Geo. W., acknowledgment to, II, 21
Riggs, Rev. S. R., Dakotah education discussed by, V, 695–697
  work, IV, 547, 548
Rights, tribal, attitude concerning, VI, 523
Riley, James, song translated by, III, 329
Riley, John, arrest, IV, 593
Rio Mimbres, Apaches in valley of, V, 206
Rising-sun men, Chippewyan name for themselves, III, 542
River Indians. *See* Messesagues.
River Raisin, massacre, VI, 356, 362
Rivières, Mlle. des, II, 278
Roach, T. J., III, 161
  explorations, III, 155
Roanoke, colony established, VI, 90, 92
  explanation of name, VI, 83
Roanoke River, Indian tale concerning, VI, 90
Robbers, name given to Chippewas of Leech Lake, V, 191
Robe trade, reference to, I, 223
Roberdeau, I., letter on Indian lands, III, 582
Robért, member of expedition, III, 353
Roberval, M. de, arrival in New France, V, 646
Robins, Capt., theft perpetrated by, V, 276
Robinson, Capt., III, 369
  commandant at Michilimackinac, VI, 256
Robinson, Chas. A., III, 130
Robinson, J. C., report on the Chickasaws, IV, 587
  school conducted by, V, 694
Robinson, Mr., III, 129
Roche, Marquis de la, explorations, V, 646
Rocheblave, fall of garrison under command of, VI, 302
Rock-fort, a natural formation, IV, 127
Rock Island, population, V, 707; VI, 700
Rock Island treaty, benefit, III, 281
Rock Island tribe, population, III, 632
Rock River, Indians on, VI, 385
Rock River Valley, cession by Sacs and Foxes, VI, 448
  Indian hostilities, VI, 450–451
Rock sculptures at Independence, Ohio, V, 113–114; VI, 604
Rockwell, Porter, treachery toward Indians, V, 201
Rockwood, Gilbert, report on missions, V, 700
Rock-writing, history recorded by, I, 405–406
  See also Inscriptions; Petroglyphs; Pictographs.
Rocky Mountain Indians of Peace River, classification, III, 542
Rocky Mountain tribes, discussion of, I, 204–228; 259–264
Rocky Mountains, description of pass, V, 574
  myth of the formation, VI, 670
  tribes, V, 197; VI, 34, 556
Rodd, D., translation by, IV, 533
Rodgers, Capt., French expelled by, from banks of the St. John, V, 675
  mention of activities, VI, 237
Rodgers, Louis, tradition related by, IV, 254, 256
Rodgers, sutler at Fort King, attack on dwelling of, VI, 471
  death, VI, 471

- Rogers, Major, II, 241; VI, 241, 257
  - at siege of Detroit, II, 304, 305
  - attack on, by Shawnees, VI, 312
  - death, VI, 312
- Rogue River Indians, apparent origin, V, 493; VI, 702
  - called Shasta, III, 632
  - census, V, 493; VI, 702
  - location, V, 493
  - origin of name, VI, 702
  - report on condition, VI, 625
- Rogues or Rascally, location, III, 201
  - population, III, 201
- Roldan, reference to followers, II, 311
- Roman Catholic Church, missionary work, V, 502, 503; VI, 734, 735
  - *See also* Jesuits; Missions.
- Rome, N. Y., origin of name, VI, 291
- Ro-mo-nans, a Dolores Mission tribe, II, 506
- Root-Diggers, VI, 34
  - application of name, IV, 221
  - classification, V, 197
  - location, V, 493
  - population, V, 493
  - Shoshonee, described, I, 213
  - synonym of Bonaks, IV, 221; VI, 34
  - *See also* Bonaks.
- Root Eaters, a Shoshonee division, I, 198
  - territory occupied, I, 198
- Roots, ceremonial use by warriors, V, 71
  - digging of, for food, IV, 221, 223
  - *See also* Medicinal plants.
- Roque-choh, a band of Bald Hill Indians, III, 139
- Rosetta stone, I, 108
- Ross, John, Chief, VI, 466
  - accusations against, VI, 501–502
  - agreement made by, VI, 475
  - Cherokee removal superintended by, VI, 493
- Ross, Lewis, plea at Washington, VI, 502
- Ross, trader, reference to marriage, VI, 345
- Round dance, object, IV, 63
- Round Heads. *See* Tetes de Boule.
- Route to Oregon, I, 223–226
  - line of, I, 224
  - posts proposed on, I, 225
- Rowe, Maj. Theodore F., III, 161
- Rowls, chief of Newichawanack, V, 228
- Rudiger, Prof., reference to works, II, 356
- Ruggles, Charles H., petition signed by, III, 618
- Ruins, Casa Grande and vicinity, III, 299–303, 304
  - described by Father Keller, III, 305
  - of mines, significance, I, 71
  - of the Pecos valley, V, 112
  - of tower at Newport, IV, 150–155
    - illustrated, I, 124
  - of tower in Grave Creek Area, I, 123
  - theories based on, I, 36
  - *See also* Antiquities.
- Runnawit, chief of Pawtucket, V, 228
- Runners, Pueblo, speed of, IV, 78
- Ruschenberger, Dr., Peruvian cemeteries visited by, II, 329
- Rush Creek, Indians, V, 712
- Rusk, Senator, of Texas, Indian legislation discussed by, V, 462, 468–469
- Russian River, brief description, III, 115
- Russian River Indians, population, III, 634; VI, 711
- Rutchogah, signer of treaty, VI, 144
- Rutherford, trader, reference to marriage, VI, 345
- Ryswick, mention of peace of, VI, 188, 190

S

- Säaptin River, Nez Percés' name for Snake River, I, 226
  - *See also* Snake River.
- Säaptins. *See* Sahaptins.
- Sabassas Indians, V, 487
  - census, V, 487
  - Indian names of divisions, V, 487
  - language spoken, V, 487
  - location, V, 487
- Sac and Fox. *See* Sacs and Foxes.
- Sac and Fox Agency, tribes embraced, IV, 467
- Sacharite, member of expedition, III, 353
- Sachem, use of term, III, 62
  - *See also* Sachemess.
- Sachemess, Uchees ruled by, III, 40–41
  - *See also* Chief.
- Sachem's Head, origin of name, VI, 122

Sachem's Plain, story of name, VI, 127
Sackanoir, population, VI, 701
Sacos, derivation of name, V, 223
  location, V, 223
  members of Pennacook Confederacy, V, 223
  See also Sokokies.
Sacramento Indians, location, III, 201
  population, III, 201
Sacramento Mountains, range of the Jicarillas, V, 206, 208
Sacramento River, fall of, I, 153
  vocabulary from, IV, 414–415
Sacramento Valley, gold deposits in, I, 153
Sacramento Valley Indians, description, VI, 710
  population, VI, 688, 710
Sacred fire. *See* Fire, sacred.
Sacrifice, among the Dacotas, II, 196, 197
  gladiatorial, Aztec, VI, 586
  human, absence of, V, 393–394
    among Aztecs, V, 77; VI, 585, 586–587, 594
    among Pawnee, IV, 50; V, 77–78
    case of, II, 198
    connected with corn planting, VI, 495–496
    custom, II, 145
    in Sun worship, V, 103
    object, IV, 51
  Indian form, IV, 637
  objects used for, I, 49
  of dogs, IV, 591; V, 168, 393
    by war-party, IV, 52
  of food, at feast, V, 171
  of horses by Otoes, V, 78
  of widows, Hindoo custom, V, 59
  offering of, discussed, I, 49–50
  private, ceremony, V, 169
  to corn-power, VI, 631
  to the Onkteri, IV, 644
  White Dog, account of, IV, 591
    by Kenistenos, V, 168
  See also Offerings.
Sacrificial ceremony, description, V, 66
Sacrificial knife, II, 90
  illustration, II, 90
Sacrificial stone, Aztec, description, VI, 586
Sacs, VI, 375
  also called Osawkees, V, 41
Sacs—Continued
  and Iowas, at missions, V, 698
  annuities, II, 585
  country occupied, III, 267, 593
  map showing location, IV, 180; VI, 519
  missionary work among, VI, 739
  population, III, 259, 593, 609
  relations with the Iowas, III, 267
  treaty concluded, VI, 330, 334, 380, 421
  See also Sacs and Foxes; Sauks; Sauks and Foxes.
Sacs and Foxes, III, 277; V, 495; VI, 687
  alliance with Menomonie, I, 304
  appropriations for, II, 564
  battle with Ojibwas, illustrated, II, 142
  census, I, 488–497; III, 621–628
  classification, V, 145
  depredations, IV, 468
  flight from lower Michigan, III, 278
  funds required for, II, 574
  general condition, IV, 466, 467; VI, 550–551
  included in Algonquin group, II, 36
  lands, ceded by, II, 604; VI, 488
    conveyed permanently to, V, 457
    occupied, VI, 414
    purchased from, II, 594, 598, 599, 600, 601
    statistics on, II, 606
  location, I, 53, 488; III, 581; IV, 461; V, 495; VI, 384–385
    maps showing, III, 96; IV, 180; VI, 519
  of the Mississippi, location, VI, 705
    population, VI, 705
    statistics on, VI, 720, 721, 723
  of the Missouri, location, VI, 705
    population, VI, 705
    statistics on, VI, 720, 721, 723
  population, I, 488, 523; V, 495; VI, 414, 687
  removal, IV, 485; V, 495; VI, 515, 516, 536
  synopsis of treaty with, V, 496, 497
  treaties with, V, 499, 500
  union of, VI, 484, 485
  wars of, VI, 488
    renewed by, V, 46
  See also Foxes; Sacs; Sauks; Sauks and Foxes.

Sa-essau-dinneh, Cheppewyans' name for themselves, ii, 27
Sagadahock (Sagadehock), vi, 174
  listed by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Sagamore, an Algonquin chief, vi, 96
  office of, vi, 115
  See also Chief.
Saganaw, occupants of, vi, 200
Saganaws, census of, i, 458–467
  description, vi, 498–499
  identified as Chippewa, vi, 200
  language, vi, 498
  name, origin and meaning of, v, 145; vi, 484
  population (1812), v, 708
  treaty with, vi, 498
  See also Chippewas of Saganaw.
Saganosh, reference to, ii, 65; vi, 236
Sagarahta. *See* Hendrick, King.
Sagard, iv, 206
  missionary labors, iv, 198–199
Sage, country covered by, v, 709
Sagennom band, location, iii, 570
  population, iii, 570
Sagima, story of, vi, 202–203
Saginaw. *See* Saganaws.
Saginaw Bay, tribes dwelling on, vi, 714
Sagitchewayosay, sun worship explained by, iv, 639
Sagoyawata (Sagoyawatha) iii, 22
  See also Red Jacket.
Sahaptins (Säaptins, Sah-aptins, Sapetans), v, 490, 493
  brief account of, iv, 551
  linguistic family, iii, 402
  location, iv, 551; v, 490, 493
    maps showing, iii, 96, 200
  population, iii, 632; iv, 551; v, 490, 493
  See also Nez Percés.
Sahehwamish. *See* Sahewamish.
Sahewamish (Sahehwamish, Sehehwamish), census of, v, 704
  location, v, 703; vi, 703
  population, v, 703; vi, 703
  See also Say-hay-ma-mish.
Sah-ma-mish. *See* Samamish.
Sah-nel Indians, and others, population, iii, 634
  language, iii, 112
  treaty with, iii, 112
Saia. *See* Siahs.
St. Ange de Bellerive, Mr., at Fort Chartres, ii, 307
  Pontiac warned by, ii, 308
St. Anthony's Falls, geological features of, iv, 192
  illustration of, iv, 192
St. Augustine, brief history of, iii, 545
  date of founding, vi, 743
  landing of Menendez at, vi, 76
St. Catharine's Island, color of Indians of, ii, 320
St. Clair, Gen. Arthur, appointment as governor, vi, 329
  campaign against western Indians, vi, 335–337
  council held with Indians, vi, 323
  defeat by Indians, v, 528; vi, 217, 287
    effect of, vi, 337
  treaties negotiated, vi, 330
S. Clair River. *See* Sinclair River.
St. Cosme, Mr., ii, 268
St. Croix River, Indians of, v, 219
St. Croix Valley, yielded to Chippewas, v, 526
St. Cyr, Michael, iii, 377, 378
St. Francis Indians, brief account of, v, 227
St. Fr. Xavier, mission established at Green Bay, v, 648
St. Germain, member of expedition, iii, 353
St. Ignace, tribal seat of the Ottawa, vi, 203
St. Jacques River, discovery, vi, 49
St. John Island, discovery, vi, 50
St. John(s) River, entered by Ribault, vi, 73
  French expelled from banks, v, 675
  Indian names for, iv, 380
  Indians, v, 219, 674
  meaning, v, 674
St. John's Indians, location, iii, 583
  population, iii, 583
St. Joseph's of Miami, Indians, vi, 275
St. Lawrence region, Indians, v, 38, 41, 137
St. Lawrence River, exploration, vi, 55–57, 743
  Indian name for, v, 633
  tribes on, vi, 33, 200

St. Lawrence Valley, explorations in, vi, 55–57
  Indians, v, 145
St. Leger, Col., expedition led by, vi, 283–286
  retreat, vi, 290
St. Martin, Jacques, ii, 266
St. Mary's and Michilimackinac Agency, statistics concerning, iii, 599–606
St. Mary's mission, establishment, v, 648
  remains, v, 110
St. Mary's River, description, v, 256
  Indians, vi, 33, 128
  naming, vi, 128
St. Peter's Agency, statistical return from, iii, 612
St. Peter's River, Indian names for, i, 183; ii, 156
  valley, illustrated, ii, 174
St. Pierre, commandant, reference to, vi, 214
St. Regis Indians, brief account of, iv, 606–607
  census, i, 441–457; v, 504–505
  classification, vi, 689
  geographical position, i, 441
  government, v, 504
  identification, v, 506
  location, iii, 583; vi, 705
  missionary work among, vi, 737
  number on reservation, ii, 542
  origin, iv, 606; vi, 200
  population, iii, 583; iv, 603, 604, 607; vi, 689, 694, 705, 707
St. Regis Reservation, census of, vi, 690
  description, ii, 542
  location, vi, 690
St. Vrain, Mr., murder of, vi, 451
Sakis. *See* Sauks.
Sakumehu, a Skagit division, v, 704
  location, v, 704; vi, 703
  population, v, 704; vi, 703
  See also Sock-a-muke.
Salic law, reference to, iii, 40
Saline and Tahlequah mission, data on, iv, 588
Saline River, vestiges of mining on, i, 100
Saline strata in the Onondaga country, iii, 97–99
Salisa mission, data on, iv, 588
Salish (Selish), v, 490
  also called Flatheads, vi, 688
  location, i, 437; v, 490
    map showing, iii, 96
  population, i, 521; v, 490; vi, 688, 701
  See also Jelish.
Salmon, habits in New England rivers, v, 225–226
  preparation for food, iii, 147
  varieties, iii, 146–147
Salmon fisheries, a reason for organization, i, 207
Salmon River, description, iii, 150
  Indians on, v, 488
Salotta, of Chehaw Town, iv, 576
Salt, search for, i, 162; iii, 98–99
Salt Lake Basin (Valley), Indians, i, 204–228; v, 198; vi, 689, 697, 698
  settlement, v, 199
Salt-making, Choctaw, vi, 526
  evidence on Saline River, i, 100
  Onontagers, iv, 340
Salt Rheum, treatment for, iv, 514
Salt springs, location, i, 163
Saltern, Mr., mention of voyage, vi, 96
Salteurs. *See* Saulteurs.
Saltketchers, Uchees at, iii, 26
Salts, occurrence in Snake territory, i, 209
Saluda Indians, relics, iv, 163, 164
Salutation, of the Dacotah, iii, 244
Samamish (Sah-ma-mish), language, iv, 600
  location, iv, 598; v, 703; vi, 703
  population, iv, 598; v, 703; vi, 703
Samdan. *See* Tako, Samdan and Sitka.
Saminda, a California tribe, vi, 711
Samish, location, v, 491, 704; vi, 703
  population, v, 491, 704; vi, 703
Samp, Indian name for crushed corn, i, 80
Sampiches, a division of the Utahs, vi, 697
Samson Occum, education of, vi, 734
Sa-mun-da, a California band, iii, 116
San Antonio de Atengo, settlement, iii, 541
San Antonio de Padua, population, i, 520
San Augustin de Atlachichilco, a Mexican settlement, iii, 542

San Augustin de Atzopan, a Mexican settlement, III, 545
San Bartholome, Spanish missions by the name of, IV, 557
San Buenaventura, population, I, 520
San Carlos de Monterey, population, I, 520
San Diego, population, I, 520
San Diego Mission, brief description, II, 100
San Domingo, Pueblo de, population, I, 519
San Felipe (San Felipe de Queres), IV, 35
  language, V, 689
  population, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
  Quirix identified as, IV, 39
San Fernando, population, I, 520
San Francisco de Azontamatlan, a Mexican settlement, III, 547
San Francisco mission, population, I, 520
San Gabriel, population, I, 520
San Il de Conso. *See* San Ildefonso.
San Ildefonso (San Il de Conso), language, V, 689
  population, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
San Joaquín, mission of Barcelona Province, IV, 556
San Joaquín Valley, illustrations of Indians, V, 217
San José, population, I, 520
San Juan, language, V, 689
  population, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
San Juan Bautista, population, I, 520
San Juan Capistrano, population, I, 520
San Juan de Atezcapo, settlement, III, 541
San Juan de Atlaca, a Mexican settlement, III, 542
San Luis Obispo, population, I, 520
San Luis Rey de Francia, population, I, 520
San Martin de Apo, a Mexican settlement, III, 530
San Martin de Atlahuilco, a Mexican settlement, III, 542
San Martin de Atzala, a Mexican settlement, III, 544
San Miguel, population, I, 520
San Pedro de Atlapulco, a Mexican settlement, III, 543
San Pedro's, brief account, I, 239
San Salvador, landing place of Columbus, IV, 554
San Simon de Azitla, a Mexican settlement, III, 547
San Simon de los Barreteras, missionary settlement, IV, 556–557
Sand-drift, I, 168–169
Sandia, IV, 216
  language, V, 689
  population, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
Sandstone, reddish, in Snake territory, I, 209
Sandusky, tribes dwelling near, VI, 714
Sandusky River, Indians on, VI, 275
Sandwich Islands, block printing in, I, 90–91
  illustration of cloth from, I, 91
Sandy Lake, Pillagers at, V, 185
  presiding chiefs, VI, 386
  Sioux driven from, II, 146, 151
Sandy Lake Chippewas, warfare on Sioux, V, 185
Sanhikans (Sanhikins), a division of the Lenno Lenapees, VI, 147
  location, VI, 100
  reference to language, III, 515
Sanpet. *See* Sampiches.
Sanpitch Valley, Indians of, V, 200
Sanpoil. *See* Hihighenimmo; Linpoilish; Senpoils.
Sans Arc (Sansarcs), a Titon division III, 629
  bands, III, 629
  country occupied, III, 629
  leading men, III, 629
  population, V, 494
  position, V, 494
Sanscrit, the language of the Hindoo race, V, 58
Santa Aña, mission of Barcelona Province, IV, 556
  population, I, 519; III, 633; VI, 688
Santa Anna, language, V, 689
Santa Barbara, a California mission, I, 520
  Indian settlements by name of, IV, 556
  mission of Barcelona Province, IV, 556

Santa Barbara—Continued
  population, I, 520
Santa Catalena de Aztla, a Mexican settlement, III, 549
Santa Clara, language, V, 689
  population, I, 519, 520; III, 633; VI, 688, 709
Santa Cruz, population, I, 520
Santa Domingo (Dominga), population, III, 633; VI, 688, 709
  See also Santo Domingo.
Santa Fe Trail, tribes discussed, I, 259–264
Santa Isabel Mission, Indians of, II, 102
Santa Maria de Atlamulco, a Mexican settlement, III, 543
Santa Maria Atzompa, a Mexican settlement, III, 544
Santa Rita del Cobre mine, V, 207
Santa Rosa, M'Kee expedition at, III, 100
  mission of Barcelona Province, IV, 556
Santana, population, VI, 709
Santeaux, a synonym of Chippewa, V, 41
Santees, II, 344
  customs, IV, 155–157
  foes of Creeks, V, 98
  incorporated with Creeks, VI, 370
  language undetermined, V, 42
  state of culture, VI, 182
  subordinate tribe of the Catawbas, VI, 179
  See also Isanyati; Sioux of the Woods.
Santeurs [misprint], at siege of Detroit, II, 242, 249
  See also Saulteurs.
Santiago, Chief of Yumas, II, 110
  election of, II, 112
  Navajo guide and informant, IV, 88–89
Santiago de Arismendi, a Mexican settlement, III, 537
Santiago de Atlatongo, a Mexican settlement, III, 543
Santiago de Azajo, a Mexican settlement, III, 547
Santo Domingo pueblo, language, V, 689
  See also Santa Domingo.
Sanyakoan. *See* Cape Fox Indians.
Saone. *See* Sowans.
Sapetans. *See* Sahaptins.
Saponi. *See* Sapoonies.
Sapoonies (Saponeys, Sapoones), country occupied, V, 668, 669; VI, 714
  population, V, 668; VI, 270, 714
Saquaacha, location, VI, 702
  population, VI, 702
  See also Quahtoma.
Saracu Indians, mentioned, IV, 556
Saratoga, derivation of name, IV, 384
  meaning of name, III, 328
  mention of Indian attack on, VI, 298
Sargeant, Rev. Mr., Indians under charge of, VI, 324
Sarsees (Sursees, Sussees), classification, III, 401, 542; V, 179
Sarsi. *See* Sarsees.
Sasitka (Satsika), VI, 688
  bands, VI, 686
  Blackfeet division, I, 437
  divisions, VI, 698
  population, IV, 560
  reference to language, III, 405
  synonym of Blackfeet, IV, 551
  territory occupied, IV, 560
  See also Blackfeet; Pawkees; Sitkeas.
Saskatchewine, included in Algonquin group, II, 36
Sassaba, Chief, I, 112
  incident connected with, VI, 386
Sassacus, VI, 114, 153, 154, 248, 647
  and the Pequot War, VI, 110–112
  death, VI, 123
  dispute with Uncas, VI, 116–117
Sasti, a linguistic family, III, 402
Satanas, a name for the Shawnee, IV, 255; VI, 219
  defeated by Iroquois, IV, 382
  foes of the Iroquois, IV, 202
  identified as the Eries, IV, 202
  Iroquois war on, VI, 188
  name, error concerning, IV, 202
    meaning of, IV, 255
  See also Shawnee.
Satos, remarks on, III, 557
Satouriona, Chief, VI, 74
  French aided by, VI, 79, 81
Satquin, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Saukies, Saukeys. *See* Sauks.

- Sauks (Sakis, Saukies, Saukeys), III, 554
  - associates of Menomonies, VI, 276
  - classification, III, 401
  - cranial measurements, II, 335
  - enemies of the French, VI, 237
  - hunting grounds, VI, 714
  - lands, IV, 572
  - language spoken, II, 341; III, 562
  - leading men, III, 568
  - location, III, 559; VI, 484, 714
  - number of villages, III, 562
  - original occupants of Saganaw, VI, 200
  - other names for, III, 562
  - population, III, 562; IV, 572; VI, 272, 714
  - totems, III, 554
  - trade, III, 564
  - trading post for, III, 566
  - tribal relations, III, 566
  - village of, now Cassville, Wis., III, 354
  - warriors III, 554, 559, 562; VI, 271
  - *See also* Sacs; Sauks and Foxes.
- Sauks and Foxes, intemperance among, I, 435
  - land claimed, III, 584
  - listed as one of Seven Fires, II, 169
  - location, III, 584
  - outbreak, I, 144
  - population, III, 584
  - scaffold burial adopted, VI, 617
  - *See also* Sacs and Foxes.
- Sault Ste. Marie, Chippewa name for, IV, 557
  - description, IV, 558
  - Jesuit mission at, VI, 397
  - seat of the Chippewas, VI, 385
  - treaty concluded at, VI, 386
- Sault Ste. Marie Agency. *See* St. Mary's and Michilimackinac Agency.
- Saulteaux. *See* Saulteurs.
- Saulteurs (Salteurs, Saulteaux), at siege of Detroit II, 265, 268, 274, 278, 281, 284, 293, 294, 296, 300
  - French name for Chippewas, V, 142
    - included in Algonquin group, II, 36
    - origin of name and language, II, 358; IV, 558; V, 144
  - *See also* Chippewas; Santeurs.
- Sausaman, Indian plot revealed by, VI, 151, 154
- Sauvanogee, identification, IV, 380
- Savage, Capt., mention of post, V, 255
- Savage, Maj., Yosemite Valley discovered by, IV, 222
- Savanas (Savannahs, Savannas), absorbed by Creeks, VI, 370
  - migration, IV, 163
  - synonym of Shawanese, V, 262
  - *See also* Shawnees.
- Savannah, Indians of vicinity, V, 42
- Savannahs, Savannas. *See* Savanas.
- Savanuca(s), era of, V, 133
  - mention of language, V, 99
- Sawahegeh, signer of treaty, VI, 144
- Sa-wa-mish, bands, V, 703
  - location, V, 703; VI, 703
  - population, V, 703; VI, 703
- Sawanese, a name for the Shawanese, V, 260
  - *See also* Shawnee.
- Saw-cesaw-dinneh, Chippewyan name for themselves, III, 542; V, 172
- Sawkins, J. G., reference to drawings, VI, 582
- Sawokli. *See* Souikilas.
- Saw-ry-ats, Utah band led by, V, 200
- Say, Mr., vocabulary collected by, III, 252
- Sayadio, a Wyandot legend, II, 235
- Say-hay-ma-mish (Sayhaywamish) brief account of, V, 700
  - language, IV, 600
  - location, IV, 598
  - population, IV, 598
  - *See also* Sahehwamish
- Scaffold burials, I, 68
  - among Oregon tribes, III, 217
  - custom, I, 102, 262
  - Dacotahs, IV, 65–66
  - description, I, 356; II, 70
  - followed by interment, IV, 66, 561
  - illustration, I, 39; V, 168
  - pictographs on, I, 337
  - reasons for, IV, 55
  - sites selected, II, 97
  - tribes practicing, VI, 617
- Scaghticoke, meaning of name, VI, 146
- Scaghticokes (Scagticokes; Scaticook), flight, VI, 147
  - refugee Pequots, VI, 200

Scalp dance, Dacotah, illustrated, II, 63; VI, 65
  feature of, II, 57
  illustration, II, 63; VI, 65
  performed by women, IV, 63
  Pueblos, IV, 78–79
  Winnebago, described, III, 285
Scalping, among the Dacotah, III, 243
  illustration showing act, II, 61; VI, 25
  mentioned, as a Hebrew custom, III, 60
  rewards given for, IV, 52
  standing determined by, V, 181
  See also Scalps.
Scalping-knife, Winnebago, IV, 54
Scalps, exhibition, II, 57
  honor of taking, II, 57
  illustration, II, 63
  payment for, VI, 308
Scandinavian element, suggestion of, in Indian culture, V, 86
Scandinavians, early visits to America, I, 106
  explorations, VI, 608
  in Massachusetts, theory concerning, III, 88
  in North America, discussion of, IV, 119–121
  visits to north Atlantic coasts, IV, 116
    monuments proving, IV, 119
Scanonaerat, a Huron tribe, IV, 204, 208
Scarhuhadigh, signer of treaty, VI, 144
Scarooyadi, VI, 213, 237
  friend of the English, VI, 219, 228
Scaticook. *See* Scaghticokes.
Schaitl, a village on Klamath River, III, 138
Scheffer, Prof., Lapland described by, I, 425
Sche-perrh, a Klamath River tribe, III, 634
  village on Klamath River, III, 138
Schermerhorn, Commissioner, VI, 475
Sche-woh, a Quoratem band, III, 151
Schoenmaker, Rev. Father, report on Osage school, IV, 594–595
Schoharie, Indian attack on, VI, 298, 306
Schoharie Valley, raid on, VI, 314
Schoolcraft, H. R., activities among Indians, V, 151–152
  agent at Sault Ste. Marie, VI, 397
  atrocities committed on relatives, VI, 305
  discussion of work, V, 54–55
  expedition in 1819, VI, 519–520
  expedition in 1831, I, 143–147; VI, 384
  Indian name for, V, 602, 603
  negotiations conducted by, VI, 464
  Ojibwa text with translation by, V, 601–603
  petition signed by, III, 618
  report on Iroquois population, IV, 603
  tour, west of the Mississippi, IV, 278–324
  visit to disaffected tribes, VI, 448, 450, 451–452
Schoolcraft, Lawrence, war exploit of, VI, 314
Schoolcraft, Mrs., I, 396
Schools, Cherokee, report on, IV, 588, 589–590
  Chippewa attitude toward, V, 150
  Choctaw, report on, IV, 584–585
  need of, in colonization plan, VI, 413
  opposition to, II, 189; IV, 477–479
  Osage, report on, IV, 594–595
  Winnebago, attendance at, III, 474
Schre-gon, a village on Klamath River, III, 138
Schregon Indian, vocabulary obtained from, III, 422
Schre-gon Indians, a Klamath River tribe, III, 634
Schuyler, General, V, 514
  aid sent by, to Fort Stanwix, VI, 290
  Johnson Hall captured by, VI, 283
Schwo-Yelpi, population, V, 705, 706; VI, 700
  See also Colville.
Scioto-Iroquois, peace overtures, VI, 259
Scioto River, tribes on, VI, 260
Scioto Valley, altar mounds, IV, 126, 128
  copper in mounds, I, 67
  mention of earthworks, VI, 597
  population, I, 73; VI, 599

Scious of the Prairies. *See* Sioux of the Meadows.
Scioux. *See* Sioux.
Scituate, Indian attack on, VI, 165
Scoffies, classification of, III, 401
Scootucks, a synonym of Passamaquoddy, V, 219
Scotch, element in Cherokees, VI, 503
Scott, Gen., VI, 453, 476
  Catawbas ruled by, III, 295
  expedition against the Indians, VI, 335
  letter to Gov. Gilmer, VI, 493–494
  negotiations with Cherokees, VI, 492, 493
  proclamation to Cherokees, VI, 491–492
  treaty negotiated by, VI, 488
Scott, Gen. Charles, in action at Presque Isle, VI, 340
Scott, Sir Walter, IV, 504
Scott's Island, Indians of, V, 488
Scott's River, description, III, 159
Scott's Valley, described, III, 160–161
Scott's Valley tribes, population, III, 171, 634
Scouler, Dr., II, 325, 326
  quoted on flattened skulls, II, 328
Scratching, as punishment, V, 273–274
  as token of friendship, V, 274
Scrolls, Mexican parchment, discussion of, VI, 604–605
Sculpture, Indian, examples, V, 113
  Indian, illustrations, V, 113; VI, 604
  Mexican, in stone, VI, 579, 585–587
  of northern tribes, IV, 663
  See also Carving; Pipe sculpture; Stonework.
Sculptured Rock, described, II, 87–88
  illustrated, II, 88
Seasons. *See* Calendar system.
Seawan. *See* Wampum.
Sebastian, Senator, Indian legislation discussed by, V, 459
Sebring, Thomas, III, 114
  explorations, III, 131
Secotan Indians, colony attacked by, VI, 93
Secotan village, VI, 86
Secowocomoco. *See* Yaocomicos.
Secret societies, initiation into, III, 287; V, 71–72
Secret societies—Continued
  three classes, V, 71
  See also Medicine feast.
Sedgwick, Maj., Fort La Tour captured by, V, 674
Sedgwick, Theodore, petition signed by, III, 618
Seduction, punishment for, II, 132
See-char-litch-ar, Creek council at, IV, 579
Seeds, gathering for food, V, 216–217
  preparation for food, illustrated, V, 217
  use of, for food, V, 212
See o ko ba, a Thla katch ka chief, IV, 579
Seepans, language, V, 689
  See also Lipans.
Seers, Indian, harm done by, IV, 637
  illustration showing activities, V, 32
  See also Jossakeed; Prophet.
Segocket, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Segotago, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Sehehwamish. *See* Sahewamish.
Sehe-perrh village, III, 147
Sekakos, chief of the Saulteurs, II, 281
Sekamish. *See* St-ka-mish.
Sekani. *See* Sicaunies.
Se-ko-pe-chi, information furnished by, I, 265
  reference to traditions, II, 32
Sekumre, an upper California language, III, 402
Selish. *See* Salish.
Selkirk, Earl of, II, 523
Selkirk, Lord, reference to settlement of, I, 143, 182
Semiahmoo. *See* Shim-i-ah-moo.
Semicivilized tribes, tables of statistics on, V, 498, 504–506
Seminole and Creek wars, estimated cost, V, 500
Seminole language, classification, III, 404
Seminole War, account of, VI, 468–473, 476–477
  cause assigned for, VI, 472
  high cost of, VI, 374
  remarks on origin, VI, 473

Seminoles (Seminolies), amalgamated with Creeks, IV, 574
  and Creeks, acres owned, VI, 519
  annuities paid to, VI, 723
  attendance at missions, V, 698
  census, III, 621–628
  classification, III, 401; VI, 688
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  derivation and meaning of name, IV, 380; V, 260; VI, 468, 473
  description, V, 260
  funds required for, II, 568
  intermarriage with Scotch, VI, 351
  lands, IV, 574; VI, 519
    ceded by, II, 604; VI, 471
    claimed, III, 584
    purchased from, II, 600
    statistics on, II, 606
  language, III, 596–597
  location assigned to, VI, 455
    maps showing, III, 96; IV, 180; V, 253; VI, 519
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 739
  origin, story of, V, 259
  original Creeks, V, 260
  population, I, 522, 524; III, 584, 597; IV, 574; V, 498; VI, 479, 688, 690, 705
  provisions of treaty with, VI, 445
  reference to dialect, III, 399
  relations with the Creeks, VI, 468
  removal, II, 558; VI, 479, 515–516
    attempted, IV, 472
    condition after, VI, 480, 534–535
  separated from Creek Confederacy, III, 401
  skirmishes with, on St. John's River, VI, 359–360
  slavery among, VI, 332
  territory occupied, III, 584, 597; VI, 32, 705
  treaties with, V, 499; VI, 332, 471–472
  war with, VI, 468–473, 476–477
Seminolies. *See* Seminoles.
Sempoiles, population, VI, 701
Seneca language, list of works in, IV, 528–529
Seneca snakeroot, use by Indians, IV, 242
Seneca tradition of the Great Snake, III, 322–323
Senecas, V, 495; VI, 143
  accused of murders in Virginia, VI, 135
  advance made by, V, 506
  amalgamated with Shawanese, IV, 574
  and Quappas, acres owned, VI, 519
  annuities, II, 585, 588
  appropriations for, II, 564
  at Braddock's defeat, VI, 217
  at council with Johnson, VI, 253
  at siege of Fort Stanwix, VI, 292
  census, III, 621; V, 504–505; VI, 718
  chief taken by Eries, III, 289
  classification, III, 401; IV, 204
  condition, II, 539–540; IV, 472
    after removal, VI, 481, 538
  conquests, IV, 606
  dispute with Ogden Company, II, 540
  distinguished chiefs, IV, 563
  division, I, 441
  fiscal statistics relating to, VI, 720, 721, 722, 723
  funds required, II, 573, 574–575
  geographical position, I, 441
  government, V, 504
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  in battle of Oriskany, VI, 289
  in Revolutionary War, V, 513
  investments for, II, 562
  lands, IV, 574
    ceded by, II, 604; VI, 445
    granted to, V, 457
    occupied by, III, 288–289; 583, 590
    purchased from, II, 595, 599, 600
    statistics on, II, 606
  location, III, 289; IV, 461; V, 495, 667, 668; VI, 147, 275, 705, 714
    maps showing, III, 96; VI, 519
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 735, 737
  mixed, acres owned by, VI, 519
  Neutral nation incorporated with, III, 290
  nicknamed Rattlesnakes, VI, 326
  number on reservations, II, 539, 540
  of Alleghany, census of, I, 441–457

- Senecas—Continued
  - of Buffalo, census of, i, 441–457
  - of Cattaraugus, census of, i, 441–457; vi, 706
  - of Conawango, census of, i, 441–457
  - of Neosho, census of, i, 441–457
  - of Tonawanda, census of, i, 441–457
  - one of the Six Nations, iv, 616
  - origin legend, iii, 322–323
  - origin of name, vi, 326
  - peace overtures of, vi, 261
  - petroleum on reservation, i, 161
  - population, i, 441; iii, 583, 590, 609, 610; iv, 528, 574, 603, 604, 605, 606; v, 495, 505, 668, 708; vi, 275, 694, 705, 706, 707, 714, 718
  - position in American Revolution, vi, 312
  - rank among tribes, i, 268
  - removal, v, 495; vi, 516, 536
    - plans for, iii, 576, 577
  - represented at Canandaigua council, vi, 326
  - reservation described, ii, 538
  - station in South Carolina, iii, 196
  - traditions regarding wars, iv, 137, 203, 345–346
  - treaties with, v, 499; vi, 262, 326, 334, 380
  - war with Andastes, vi, 139–140, 144
  - war with Eries, iv, 200–203
  - warriors, estimate of, iii, 561; vi, 261, 270
  - *See also* Buffalo Indians; Mingoes; Sennekas; Sinikers.
- Senecas and Shawnees, census of, i, 441–457
  - fiscal statistics relating to, vi, 721, 722, 723
  - location, i, 441; vi, 705
  - map showing colony, iv, 180
  - population, iii, 609, 610; v, 495; vi, 705
  - removal, vi, 516, 536
    - condition after, vi, 539
- Senecas, New York, fiscal statistics relating to, vi, 721, 723
  - of Alleghany, population, vi, 688
  - of Buffalo, population, vi, 688
  - of Cattaragus, population, vi, 688
  - of the Neosho, treaty signed by, vi, 461
- Senecas, New York, etc.—Continued
  - of Tonawanda, population, vi, 688
  - Sandusky, location, vi, 705
    - population, vi, 705
- Sennekas, one of Five Nations, iii, 184
  - *See also* Senecas.
- Senpoils, location, vi, 688
  - population, i, 521; vi, 688
- Senses, acuteness of, iii, 212–213
- Sequoia (Sequoya), or Guess, iv, 590
  - Cherokee alphabet invented by, ii, 228
  - *See also* Soquoiah.
- Seraticks, associated with Lipans, i, 239
  - territory occupied by, i, 239
  - *See also* Arapaho.
- Seretees, a name for the Santee, iv, 155
  - *See also* Santee.
- Sergeant, Hon. John, measurements of hair, iii, 383, 392
  - missionary work, vi, 734, 735, 736
- Serpentine, pipe from Onondaga area, i, 75
  - use by Aztecs, i, 73
- Serpent Mound, interpretation, i, 32
- Serpents, attitude toward, iii, 231, 273
  - encountered in northwest California, iii, 111–112
  - feathered, myth of, vi, 640
  - respect for, i, 414
  - symbolism, i, 414; v, 105
- Serper. *See* Sche-perrh.
- Serragoin Indian, vocabulary obtained from, iii, 422
- Serra-goin trail, mentioned, iii, 152
- Seseetoan and Wahpaytoan band, payments made to, vi, 721
- Sessatons. *See* Sissitons.
- Seven Caves of Navatlaques, i, 20
  - probable location, i, 22
- Seven Cities, story of, iv, 22
- Seven Fires of the Sioux, discussion, ii, 169
- Severn River, Indian treaty signed at, vi, 144
  - settlement of Puritans on, vi, 143
- Sevier, Gen., references to, iv, 630
- Sewall's Island, occupied by Pennacooks, v, 230
- Sewan-akies, descriptive name of Metoacs, vi, 147
  - meaning of name, vi, 147

Seward, Senator, of New York, former Governor of New York, v, 464
  Indian legislation discussed by, v, 464–465
Se wat palla, population, v, 706
Sewee Indians, disaster suffered by, IV, 155
  subordinate tribe of the Catawbas, VI, 179
Sexes, indifference between, v, 274
Sexual relations, among the Creeks, v, 272
  See also Adultery; Marriage Customs.
Seyffart, Anthony, v, 681, 682
Shaa. *See* Schaitl.
Shad, habits in New England rivers, v, 225–226
Shagobai, a noted Pillager, v, 189
Shahala(h) Nation, location, III, 570
  population, III, 570, 609
  tribes composing, III, 570
Shah-wah-no, origin legend, v, 192
  See also Shawnee.
Shaitl, a Klamath River tribe, III, 634
Shakewah, an interpreter, IV, 274
Shallala(h), location, III, 571
  population, III, 571, 609; v, 707
Shallattoos, location, III, 572
  population, III, 572; v, 706
Shamindawa, Chief, VI, 255
Shamokin (Shaumokin; Shemoken; Shomoken), birthplace of Logan, IV, 616
  Delawares at, v, 138
  Delawares ordered to, III, 74
  identification, IV, 325, 616
  mission at, v, 503
    destruction of, IV, 619
  use made of, IV, 617
Shamwappoms (Chanwappan), location, III, 572
  population, III, 572; v, 706
Shanamkarak. *See* Eh-qua-nek.
Shanel. *See* Sah-nel.
Shanel-kaya band, at Clear Lake Council, III, 109
  language, III, 110, 112
  location, III, 109, 114
Shanico's band, number of, III, 635
Shanwappom. *See* Shamwappoms.
Shasta (Shasté, Shasties), application of name, III, 156
Shasta—Continued
  called Rogue River Indians, III, 632
  classification, III, 402
  location, III, 156, 201
    map showing, III, 96, 200
  population, III, 201
Shasta (Shasté) Valley, description, III, 165
  Indian population, III, 171, 634
Shastan family. *See* Sasti; Shasta.
Shastan language. *See* Shasté language.
Shasté. *See* Shasta.
Shasté Butte city, described, III, 164
Shasté language, extent of, III, 422
  reservation for tribes speaking, III, 171
Shasté River, description, III, 165–166
Shastie. *See* Shasta.
Shaugawaumikong. *See* Chegoimegon; Lapointe.
Shaumokin. *See* Shamokin.
Shaw, Rev. Mr., v, 689
Sha-wa-ke-shig, distinguished Pillager warrior, II, 165
Shawanees. *See* Shawanese.
Shawanese [village], a Creek town, v, 262
Shawanese (Shawanees, Shawanoes, Shawanos, Shawanous), amalgamated with Senecas, IV, 574
  at siege of Detroit, II, 284, 285
  brief account of, III, 561
  called "Chats" by the French, IV, 202
  Creeks joined by, v, 260
  hunting grounds, VI, 714
  lands, IV, 572, 574
  location, v, 122; VI, 714
  mission church, v, 698
  origin legend, I, 19; v, 192
  peace made by, v, 139
  population, III, 610; IV, 572, 574; VI, 714
  preparation of food, IV, 332
  refugee towns, v, 262
  relations with Michigamies, v, 195–196
  tradition, III, 82
  village of, IV, 334
  warriors, III, 561; IV, 605
  See also Shawnees.

Shawano, a mythological character, v, 409
Shawanoes, Shawanos, Shawanous. *See* Shawanese.
Shawawnon, Chief, ii, 259
Shawmut, origin of name, iv, 562
Shawnee language, an Algonquin dialect, ii, 341
  evidence in Florida, ii, 34
  publications in, iv, 541
  vocabulary, ii, 470–481
Shawnee Prophet. *See* Elkswatawa.
Shawnees (Shawnese, Shawnesse, Shawnoes), iii, 555; v, 527; vi, 140
  affiliations, iv, 621
  agriculture among, vi, 541–542
  alliance with Menomonie, i, 304
  and Delawares, population, vi, 708
  and others, battle with, vi, 266
  annuities, ii, 586, 588, 589
  at Braddock's defeat, vi, 217, 218
  at council with Sir William Johnson, vi, 233
  attitude toward the colonies, vi, 242
  battles with Virginians, vi, 307
  beginning of war with, vi, 264
  census, i, 488–497; iii, 621–628
  classification, iii, 401; v, 145
  condition, iv, 466, 472; vi, 517
    after removal, vi, 481, 541–542, 544
  cranial measurements, ii, 335
  depredations, vi, 236
  enemies of the colonies, vi, 219
  fighting characteristics, vi, 300
  fire worship among, v, 67
  fiscal statistics relating to, vi, 721, 723
  funds required for, ii, 574
  included in Algonquin group, ii, 36
  in Florida, iii, 90
  in Kentucky, i, 300, 301
  in league with Nanticokes and Mohickanders, vi, 132
  intruders in Texas, i, 240
  investments for, ii, 561, 562
  land, ceded by, ii, 602, 604; vi, 445
    claimed, iii, 583, 585
    false claims to, vi, 330
    granted permanently to, v, 457
Shawnees—Continued
  land—Continued
    purchased from, ii, 593, 595, 598, 599, 600
    statistics on, ii, 605, 606
  language, reference to, iii, 96
  location i, 488; iii, 559, 583, 585, 591, 592; iv, 461, 620; v, 495; vi, 32, 33, 275, 705
    maps showing, iii, 96; vi, 519
  map showing colony of, iv, 180
  migrations, v, 122; vi, 197, 277, 420
  missionary work among, vi, 737, 738, 739, 740
  name, iv, 255–256; v, 41; vi, 688
  of Wapakanetta, location of, iv, 461
  origin tradition, iv, 147, 255; vi, 277–278
  pacification, iv, 615
  peace sought by, vi, 254, 259, 260, 261, 343
  population, i, 518, 524; iii, 583, 585, 591, 609, 635; iv, 606; v, 495, 708; vi, 271, 272, 275, 688, 699, 705
  position in Revolutionary War, vi, 281, 293, 295, 299–301
  relations with other tribes, vi, 300
  removal, iv, 460; v, 495; vi, 516, 536
    condition after, vi, 541–542, 544
    plans for, iii, 576, 577
  size of brain, ii, 330
  stature, iv, 349
  subjection to Iroquois, iv, 617
  travels of, vi, 219
  treaties with, v, 496, 497, 499; vi, 328, 334, 380, 420
  warriors, number of, iii, 555, 559; vi, 261, 271
  within Neosho Colony, iv, 460
  See also Chauenous; Neosho Senecas and Shawnees; Satanas; Savannas; Senecas and Shawnees; Shah-wah-no; Shawanese.
Shawneetown, origin of name, i, 301; vi, 277
Shawnese, Shawnesse. *See* Shawnees.
Shawnoes. *See* Shawnees.
Shea, John Gilmary, paper on Mascoutins, iv, 244
Sheastuckles, location, iii, 571
  population, iii, 571
Shecomeco. *See* Shekomeko.

Shedrac, a Micmac settlement, v, 677
Sheep, importance to Navajoes, iv, 212
  introduction into New Mexico, vi, 616
  raising of, by Moquis, iv, 72
  use by the Navajo, v, 204
Sheep Indians, an Athapascan tribe, iii, 542
She-kom band, at Clear Lake council, iii, 109
Shekomeko (Shecomeco, Shicomico, Shikomico), missionary work at, v, 138, 503, 680–682
Shell-heaps, in the Carolinas, v, 80
Shell mounds in South Carolina, reference to, ii, 89
Shell ornaments, from burials, i, 68
  use, i, 86
Shells, barter in, i, 67
  marine, in Rocky Mountain region, i, 218
  use, as charms, i, 86
    as currency, i, 84; ii, 113; iii, 220
    by conjurors, iv, 490
  value, ii, 113
  See also Wampum.
Shemoken. *See* Shamokin.
Shenandoa(h) Chief, reference to oratory of, v, 410
  stature, iv, 349
  traditional birthplace, vi, 136
  See also Skenandoah.
Sheshatapoosh, classification, iii, 401
  See also Montagnais.
She-sheeb, ii, 153
  death, ii, 160, 163
She-she-quin, Indian name of Queen Esther's Flats, v, 671
Shicomico. *See* Shekomeko.
Shields, buffalo hide, i, 236
  Comanche custom concerning, ii, 127
  decoration, iii, 69
  illustration, iii, 68
  used by prairie tribes, iii, 69
Shigom. *See* She-kom.
Shikelimo, Chief, iv, 337, 340
  accident to, iv, 328
  death, iv, 619
  father of Logan, iv, 325, 616; vi, 264
  guide of expedition, iv, 325, 326, 616, 617
Shikelimo—Continued
  Moravians welcomed by, iv, 617
  See also Shikillimus, Chief.
Shikillimus, Chief, friend of the Whites, v, 669
  See also Shikelimo.
Shikomico. *See* Shekomeko.
Shimiahmoo, location, v, 491, 704; vi, 703
  population, v, 491, 704; vi, 703
Shinecock Reservation, census of, vi, 690
  location, vi, 690
Shinecocks, vi, 688
  population, vi, 688
Shingabawassin (Shingabwassin), account of, vi, 399
  Chippewa chief, vi, 385
  grave-post of, i, 357
  leading Chippewa, v, 148
Shingebiss, story of, iii, 324–326
Shingiss, a Delaware sachem, vi, 213, 219
Shingwauk (or Little Pine) Chief, brief account of, i, 112; iv, 557
  inscriptions deciphered by, i, 113–118; iii, 85–87
ShingwauköNce, pictographs explained by, i, 339
Shinnecock. *See* Shinecock.
Shipaulovi. *See* Juparivi.
Shirley, Gen., vi, 224, 226, 233
Shistacoostee (Sisticoosta), census of, v, 493
  location, vi, 702
  population, vi, 702
Shoalwater Bay. Indian customs at, vi, 619–622
  Indians on, vi, 703
  preservative quality of soil near, vi, 623
Shobarboobeer, location, iii, 572
  population, iii, 572
Sho-go-nik-kaw, account of, iv, 234
  myth related by, iv, 228–230
Shokomish. *See* Skokomish.
Shomamish (S'Ho-ma-mish), census of, v, 704
  location, iv, 598; v, 703; vi, 703
  population, iv, 598; v, 703; vi, 703
  See also Homamish.
Shomoken. *See* Shamokin.
Shongopovi. *See* Sumonpavi.

Shorikowani, a Canadaigua chief, IV, 200
  death, IV, 201
  war led by, IV, 200
"Short-haired Indians," description, III, 119
Shoshocoes, a band of Shoshonies, VI, 697
Shoshoko. *See* Root Diggers; Shoshocoes; Sosokos.
Shoshonean family. *See* Shoshone(e) group.
Shoshone(e) group, a linguistic family, III, 402
  brief account of, II, 37–38
  cultural status, II, 334
  divisions, V, 493; VI, 34–35
  estimated population, I, 199, 522
  one of seven ethnological families, II, 33, 343
  route of migration, II, 38
  territory occupied, I, 197, 198; II, 37–38; IV, 551; V, 197; VI, 34–35
  tribes composing, I, 197; IV, 551
Shoshonee language, I, 198; III, 403; VI, 697
  brief vocabulary, I, 216, 218
Shoshonees (Shoshones, Shoshonies), IV, 596; V, 494; VI, 688
  account of, I, 198–203; V, 198–199
  attitude toward the insane, IV, 49
  bands, VI, 697
  brain cavity, II, 333
  character, I, 200
  condition, I, 202
  cooking vessels, I, 61
  cranial capacity, VI, 574
  cranial measurements, II, 335
  decrease in number, I, 202, 228
  division of the Snake Indians, I, 206
  effect of introduction of horses, VI, 616
  inaccessible haunts, I, 221
  location, I, 224; III, 570, 572
    maps showing, II, 28; III, 96, 200
  peace overtures to Utahs, IV, 596
  population, III, 570, 572, 609; V, 493, 494, 498; VI, 688, 697, 701
  reference to food, I, 41
  resemblances to other tribes, I, 217
Shoshonees—Continued
  territory occupied, I, 198, 201, 437; V, 198, 199, 493, 494; VI, 697
  See also Shoshone(e) group; Snake Indians; Soshawnese.
Shoshones. *See* Shoshonee group; Shoshonees.
Shoshoni. *See* Shoshonees.
Shotlemamish (Hotlimamish, S'hotle-ma-mish), brief account of, V, 700
  location, V, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 703; VI, 703
  See also Srootle-ma-mish.
Shoto, location, III, 570
  population, III, 570
Shou a gan, census of, V, 489
  language, V, 489
Shregegon. *See* Schre-gon.
Shutaunomanok. *See* Cho-tan-o-man-as.
Shuttle, bone, illustration, I, 89
  use and description, I, 88
Shuyelpes, maps showing location, III, 96, 200
  See also Colville.
Shyennes, classification, III, 402
  See also Cheyenne.
Sia. *See* Cia; Silla.
Siahs (Sians), location, III, 139
Siarh yoholo, of Tuck a batch cha town, IV, 575
Siba, the chief, meaning of name, III, 303
Siberia, inscriptions, I, 424
Sibley, H. H., buffalo hunting described by, IV, 94–110; V, 49
Sicaunies, an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
  population, II, 28
Sichomovi. *See* Chemovi.
Sick naa hutty, a Stikeen River tribe, V, 489
  census of, V, 489
Sickness, attitude toward patient, I, 249
  ceremony of curing, V, 422–423
  See also Disease; Medical practices.
Sicopan tribe, hostilities with, VI, 92
Siege of Fort Detroit, journal giving details, II, 242–308
Siginoc, signature of, II, 226
Sign language. *See* Pictography.
Signals, trees used for, III, 150–151
Signatures, pictographs used as, II, 226

Siknahadi. *See* Sick naa hutty.
Siksika. *See* Blackfeet; Pawkees; Sasitka; Sitkeas.
Silela. *See* Shallalah.
Silla (Sille), another name for Cia, iv, 35
  Chia identified as, iv, 39
  language, v, 689
  population, i, 519; iii, 633
Sille. *See* Silla.
Silliman, Prof. Benjamin, measurements of hair of, iii, 383
Silures, probable origin, v, 34
Silver, destruction of articles, iv, 450
  in Michigan, i, 161
  value placed on, by the Indian, i, 93
Silver Bluffs, Uchees at, iii, 26, 27
Silversmiths, ancient, skill of, iv, 451–452
Similoculgee, Creek name for the Seminole, iv, 380
  See also Seminole.
Simonds, James, survey conducted by, v, 675
Simonise, William S., song presented by, ii, 309
Sinaahmish, a Skagit division, v, 704
  census, v, 704
  location, v, 704; vi, 703
  population, v, 704; vi, 703
Sinahamish (Sinahemish, Sinahomish), bands, v, 704
  brief account of, v, 701
  census v, 701, 704
  location, v, 704; vi, 703
  population, i, 521; v, 704; vi, 703
  See also Sinnamish; Snohomish.
Sinahemish, Sinahomish. *See* Sinahamish.
Sinahomish (Sinabomish) River, bands on, vi, 703
  Indian population, v, 491
Sinamish of Whidley's Island, population, vi, 701
Sinclair, Lt., commandant at Michilimackinac, vi, 256
  feat accomplished by, vi, 256
Sinclair River, probable origin of name, vi, 256
Singsing, derivation of name, iv, 380
  origin, vi, 116
Sinhumamish (Spokane), population, iii, 632; v, 707; vi, 700
  See also Larlielo; Spokanes.
Sinicker (Sinikers), a name for the Senecas, iv, 332, 605
  warriors, iv, 605
  See also Senecas.
Sinker, Pennacook, illustrated, iv, 175
Sinnamish, included in Qualliamish, vi, 688
  population, i, 521; vi, 688
  See also Sinahamish.
Sin-ne-gars, a name for Senecas, vi, 326
  See also Senecas.
Sinojos, a branch of the Ottowas, iii, 554
Sinslaw. *See* Sheastuckles.
Sintsinks. *See* Singsing.
Sioto River, tribe dwelling on, vi, 714
Siouan group (stock), a linguistic stock, i, 197; iii, 402
  tribes composing, i, 197; iii, 593–594; vi, 34
Siouan languages, publications in, iv, 546–551
  See also Sioux language and under tribal names.
Sioux (Scious), iii, 557; vi, 375
  Algonquin name for, v, 193
  alliance with Menomonie, i, 304
  and Chippewas, hostilities between, i, 142, 143; ii, 547–548; v, 98–99, 524
    peace negotiations, i, 338
  and Snake Indians, war-ground, i, 200
  appropriation for, ii, 564
  attack on Delawares, vi, 543
  attack on Pawnees, iv, 466
  battle with Ojibwas, ii, 143, 149–150, 151
  beliefs, ii, 175, 177, 178
  census, iii, 621–628; v, 701–702
  chief, iii, 568
  country occupied by, i, 197; iii, 594; vi, 275, 384, 705
  description of ceremony, v, 435
  divisions, ii, 168–169; v, 435
  driven from Pillager territory, v, 184
  enemies of Mandans, iii, 253
  evacuation of Lake Winnipeg, ii, 151
  funds required, ii, 573–574

- Sioux—Continued
  - lands, iv, 464–465
    - ceded by, ii, 604
    - purchased from, ii, 594, 599, 601
    - statistics on, ii, 606
  - location of towns, ii, 141
  - migration legend, v, 98
  - migrations, ii, 172; v, 98
  - modifications of Midawin, v, 428, 429
  - name given to rice, i, 187
  - other names, iii, 562
  - population, iii, 594, 609, 614, 629, 631; vi, 275, 276, 688, 705
    - with others (1812), v, 708
  - recommendations concerning, ii, 548
  - Seven Fires, one of, ii, 169
  - totems, iii, 557
  - treaties with, v, 499, 500; vi, 380
  - use of the word, ii, 170
  - village taken by Ojibwas, ii, 146
  - warriors, estimate of, iii, 557
  - wars, vi, 488
    - with Chippewas, vi, 387–389
    - with Ojibwas, ii, 150–160
    - with Pillagers, v, 186–187
  - *See also* Aboinug; Blackfeet Sioux; Brules; Bwoin; Dakota; Sioux of the Meadows; Sioux of the Mississippi; Sioux of the Missouri; Sioux of the Plains; Sioux of the Woods.
- Sioux country, caves described, ii, 95–99
  - description, ii, 172–175
  - rich soil, i, 182
- Sioux language, Lord's Prayer in, v, 592
  - poverty of, vi, 393
- Sioux of the Meadows (Scious of the Prairies), country occupied, iii, 559
  - population, iii, 557
  - totems, iii, 557
  - warriors, estimate of, iii, 557, 559
  - *See also* Tetons.
- Sioux of the Mississippi, fiscal statistics relating to, vi, 720, 721, 723
  - location, vi, 705
  - population, i, 524; vi, 705
- Sioux of the Missouri, location, vi, 705
  - population, i, 524; vi, 696, 705
- Sioux of the Plains, location, vi, 705
  - population, vi, 705
- Sioux of the Woods, country occupied, iii, 559
  - warriors, estimate of, iii, 559
- Sisitonwan, a subdivision of the Isanyati, i, 248
- Sisseton. *See* Sisitonwan; Sissitons; Sussetons.
- Sissitons (Sessatons), vi, 688
  - Dakotah band, vi, 350
  - language spoken, iii, 563
  - leading men, iii, 569
  - other names for, iii, 563
  - population, iii, 563
  - trade, iii, 565
  - trading post, iii, 567
  - tribal relations, iii, 567
  - warriors, number of, iii, 563
  - *See also* Seseetoan; Sussetons.
- Sisters of Loretto, missionary work, v, 699
- Sisters of St. Joseph, missionary work, v, 699
- Sisticoosta. *See* Shistacoostee.
- Sitka [Indians], location, iii, 402
- Sitka [village], tribes trading at, v, 489
- Sitka. *See* Tako, Samdan and Sitka Indians.
- Sitkeas, divisions, iii, 252
  - territory occupied, iii, 252
  - *See also* Siksika.
- Siva, reference to worship, v, 58
- Six, Chief, pictograph representing, vi, 390
- Six Nations, i, 197
  - address from Committee on Indian Affairs, vi, 293–296
  - annuities, ii, 584; vi, 723
  - attitude during Revolutionary War, vi, 277, 281, 283
  - condition, ii, 554
  - council held, iv, 339
  - discussion of pamphlet on, i, 125
  - enemies of Ojibwas, ii, 139
  - funds required for, ii, 573
  - historical sketches of, v, 631–646
  - hunting grounds, v, 667
  - land, ceded by, vi, 323
    - purchased from, ii, 593
  - location, ii, 36; iii, 559, 590
  - mythology, vi, 666–670

Six Nations—Continued
  origin, v, 37
  peace overtures made by, vi, 254
  population, total, vi, 718
  power and influence, v, 481
  progress, vi, 537
  relations with the French, v, 522–523
  treaty made with, vi, 330
  tribes composing, iii, 590; iv, 616
  war with Canada, iii, 518–520
  warriors, number of, iii, 555, 559, 561; vi, 276
  See also Five Nations.
Si-yante, a Tuolumne band, iv, 407
  See also Typoxies.
Skaddals, location, iii, 572
  population, iii, 572, 609; v, 706
Skadjets, Skagats, Skagets. *See* Skagit tribe.
Skagit River, Indians on, v, 491; vi, 703
Skagit tribe (Skadjets, Skagats, Skagets), brief account of, v, 701
  divisions, v, 704
  language, iv, 600
  location, iv, 598; v, 704; vi, 703
  population, i, 521; iv, 598; v, 704; vi, 688, 703
Skagots, population, vi, 701
Skaisis, maps showing location, iii, 96, 200
  See also Koetenay; Kutenai.
Skal-lum. *See* S'klallams.
Skaw-o-mut, or Black Chief, signature, ii, 226
Skea-wa-mish, language, iv, 600
  location, iv, 598
  population, iv, 598
  See also Skeysehamish.
Skedans. *See* Skee dans.
Skee dans, census of, v, 489
  language, v, 489
  location, v, 489
Skeena Indians, v, 487
  census, v, 487
  Indian names for divisions of, v, 487
  language spoken, v, 487
  location, v, 487
Skeetsomish (Sketsomish), location, iii, 572
  population, iii, 572, 609; v, 706
  See also Skitsaih; Coeur d'Alene.
Skeina, a Klamath River village, iii, 150
Skeletal remains, period of decomposition, iv, 129
  See also Bones; Skulls.
Skeleton, gigantic animal, exhibition, i, 174
"Skeleton in armor," at Fall River, mentioned, iii, 88
  discussion of, i, 127–128
Skenando, Young, vocabulary, ii, 482
Skenandoa(h), Chief, iii, 22; vi, 277, 504, 647
  an Oneida, v, 130
  at Canandaigua council, vi, 326
  biography, v, 509–518
  burial, v, 515, 517
  character, v, 509, 510, 511, 514
  death, v, 517
  friendly to colonies, vi, 280
  oratory, iii, 198; iv, 627; v, 154, 516, 518
  part taken in Revolutionary War, v, 514
  personal appearance, v, 509, 514
  See also Shenandoah.
S'ke-tehl-mish, location, v, 703; vi, 703
  population, v, 703; vi, 703
Sketsomish. *See* Skeetsomish.
Skeysehamish (Skeywhamish, Skeywhomish, Skywhamish), a Sin-a-ho-mish band, v, 704
  brief account of, v, 701
  location, v, 704; vi, 703
  population, i, 521; v, 704; vi, 688, 701, 703
Skico, plot revealed by, vi, 91
Skidegate. *See* Skitt de gates.
Skidegattz, a linguistic family, iii, 402
Skidi. *See* Pani-Mahaws; Pawnee Loups.
Skihawamish. *See* Skea-wa-mish; Skeysehamish.
Skilelamo, vi, 213
Skilloot, location, iii, 571
  population, iii, 571, 609
  See also Caloait.
Skin dressing, first process in, i, 91
  illustration of, ii, 67
  implement used, i, 91
  implements, illustrated, ii, 516
  method, ii, 64; iii, 214; iv, 60–61; v, 692
  work of women, i, 91; ii, 515

Skin, Indian, characteristics, iv, 59, 69, 350
  color, ii, 320; vi, 573
  peculiarity, v, 216
Skins used as currency, ii, 178; iii, 207
  used in pictography, vi, 607
  See also Furs.
Skitsaih, classification, iii, 402
  See also Skeetsomish.
Skitswish. *See* Conerd Helene; Coeur d'Alene; Skeetsomish; Skitsaih; Stietshoi.
Skittagetan family. *See* Skidegattz.
Skitt de gates, census of, v, 489
  language, v, 489
  location, v, 489
S'klallams (Skal-lum, Sklal-lums), bands, v, 703
  language, iv, 600
  location, iv, 598; v, 703; vi, 703
  population, iv, 598; v, 491; vi, 703
  See also Clallam.
Skloo, fortifications erected by, vi, 613
Skokomish (Shokomish, Sko-sko-mish), brief account of, v, 701
  language, iv, 600
  location, iv, 598; v, 491, 703; vi, 703
  population, iv, 598; v, 491, 703; vi, 703
  See also Hokamish.
Skookum, evil spirit of Chinooks, vi, 619
  evil spirit of Oregon Indians, vi, 630
Skope-ah-mish, location, v, 703; vi, 703
  population, v, 703; vi, 703
Sko-sko-mish. *See* Skokomish.
Skrœllings, driven from New England, v, 97
  identified as Esquimaux, ii, 28
  occupants of Vinland, vi, 742
Sktahlejum (Sk-tah-le-jum), a Sin-a-ho-mish band, v, 704
  location, v, 704; vi, 703
  population, v, 704; vi, 703
  See also Skuck-stan-a-jumps.
Skuck-stan-a-jumps, language, iv, 600
  location, iv, 598
  population, iv, 598
Skulls, artificial modification, ii, 323–328
  Chenook, illustrated, ii, 318, 320, 322
  description, ii, 316–317
  facial angle, vi, 574
Skulls—Continued
  internal capacity, vi, 574
  necromantic use of, iv, 489–490
  of early man, ii, 319
  of the Eskimo, v, 291
  supposed Congaree, described, iv, 168–169
  Winnebago compared with Chenook, ii, 333
  Winnebago, illustrated, ii, 324
  See also Crania.
Skwalz, classification, iii, 402
  See also Nisqually.
Slakagulgus, a Creek town, v, 262
Slave Indians, beard, ii, 322
Slavery, absent among Dacotahs, iv, 63
  among Appalachian tribes, v, 498
  among Cherokees, vi, 442, 531
  among Creeks, v, 259–260
  among Puget Sound Indians, iv, 600
  among southern tribes, vi, 332
  captives sold into, ii, 115
  Indians sold into, by Whites, ii, 20; iii, 22
  See also Slaves.
Slaves, Chinook, buried with the dead, ii, 71
  Creek, census of, iv, 575–581
  degradation, ii, 116
  in United States, statistics, iv, 610
  living, buried with the dead, ii, 71
  made of captives, ii, 116
  number among the Navaho, i, 244
  sacrifice of, for the dead, vi, 622
  status, iii, 216
  treatment, v, 654
  use made of, by Creeks, vi, 417
  See also Captives.
Slaves, Negro, owned by Chickasaw, v, 482
  owned by Creeks, v, 483
Sleeping Stone, reference to massacre of, vi, 119
Sloat, Commodore, ii, 119
Smak shop (Smockskop) band, location, iii, 114
  population, iii, 570, v, 706
Sma-léh-hu (Smalehhu), a Skagit division, v, 704
  location, v, 704; vi, 703
  population, v, 704; vi, 703
Smalihu. *See* Sma-léh-hu.

Smallpox, among prairie tribes, III, 254
  among the Winnebago, IV, 232
  among western tribes, VI, 486–487
  Indian treatment for, I, 234; III, 295; IV, 512
  ravages of, I, 257–258; II, 239; III, 107; VI, 556.
Small Wolf, a Comanche chief, II, 128
Smel-ka-mish, location, V, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 703; VI, 703
Smith, Buckingham, I, 84
  translations by, III, 297
Smith, Capt. David, I, 311
Smith, Charles Hamilton, theory of, I, 22
Smith, Lt., Constantine, death of, VI, 471
Smith, Jedediah S., explorations of, III, 136
  map made by, III, 136
Smith, Capt. John, II, 19, 29; VI, 128
  Chesapeake Bay explored by, VI, 131
  expedition joined by, VI, 96
  New England named by, VI, 104
  New England tribes listed by, V, 218
  saved by Pocahontas, VI, 97
Smith, John S., vocabulary collected by, III, 446
Smith, Rev. Lewis, V, 689
Smith, Mr., estimates of number of warriors, made by, III, 553–561
Smith, President, criticism of essay by, V, 82
Smith, Dr. Thomas, theory of, on races of mankind, V, 288–289
Smith's River, application of the name, III, 137
Smithsonian Institution, IV, 132; VI, 232, 602
  publication issued by, IV, 547, 548
  suggestion to Regents of, IV, 657–661
Smockskop band. *See* Smak shop.
Smoking introduced among Dacotahs, III, 244
  See also Peace pipe; Pipes; Smoking customs; Tobacco.
Smoking customs, I, 72–75
  conclusions drawn from, I, 73–74
  in ceremonies, V, 169–170
  See also Pipes; Tobacco.
Smoot, Col. B. L., IV, 630
Smulkamish. *See* Smel-ka-mish.
Snag, Shoshoni chief, V, 198
Snake. *See* Serpents.
Snake Indians, III, 632; VI, 695, 698
  band of Shoshonies, VI, 697
  census, VI, 556
  characteristics, I, 219
  classification, III, 402; IV, 551
  cooking pots, I, 61
  country of, described, I, 208–211
  description, I, 202
  diversified dialects of, I, 206
  food, I, 221
  included in Shoshonee group, I, 197
  language of, cognate with Comache, III, 403
  population, I, 521, 522; V, 498; VI, 689, 695
  synonym of Shoshonies, V, 198
  territory inhabited by, I, 206; VI, 556
  war ground of, I, 200
  See also Green River Snakes; Shoshonees; Soshawnese.
Snake River Indians, VI, 697, 698
Snake River Valley, geography, I, 208–211
  variations in temperature in, I, 210
Snakes proper, population, V, 498
Snares, set by children, II, 50
Sno-ho-mish, language of, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598
  population, IV, 598
  See also Sinahamish; Sinnamish.
Snoqualamick (Sno-qual-a-muk, Sno-qual-a-muke, Snoqualimich, Snoqualmick, Snoqualmook), population, I, 521; IV, 598; V, 704; VI, 689, 701, 703
Sno-qual-a-muk (Sno-qual-a-muke). *See* Snoqualamick.
Sno-qual-a-muke, language of, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598; V, 704; VI, 703
Snoqualimich. *See* Snoqualamick.
Snoqualmick (Snoqualmook, a Sin-a-homish band, V, 704
  brief account of, V, 701
  See Snoqualamick.
Snoqualmook, census of, V, 704
Snoqualmu. *See* Snoqualamick.
Sno-qua-mish, language of, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598
  population, I, 521; IV, 598; VI, 689, 701

Snowshoes, Athapascan, described, v, 177–178
  Chippewa female, illustrated, v, 147
  illustrations of, III, 68
  making, described, III, 68
Snow snakes, illustrations, II, 516
  instruments used in game, II, 516
Soccorro. *See* Socorro.
Social organization, antiquity of, III, 62
  Apache, v, 210
  Chickasaw, I, 311
  Creek, I, 274–277; v, 279
  Delaware, v, 136
  necessities for, I, 207
  Snake Indians, I, 207
  See also Caste; Chieftaincy; Family; Relationship; Tribal organization.
Social relations within the tribe, II, 74–76
Societies. *See* Secret societies.
Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among Indians of North America, missions of, VI, 737
Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, work of, v, 502, 503; VI, 734, 735, 736
Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, work of, VI, 108, 734, 735, 736
Society of Friends, missionary work of, VI, 737
Society of Jesus, missions of, VI, 735
Society of the United Moravian Brethren, missionary work of, v, 502, 503
Sock-a-muke, language of, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598
  population, IV, 598
  See also Sakumehu.
Sock o par toy, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Socorro (Soccorro), III, 633
  population, I, 519; VI, 689
Sogahatches, a Creek town, v, 262
Soguspogus, a Creek town, v, 262
Sohokies. *See* Sokokies.
Sohoshonee, native name for Shoshonee, I, 206
Soiengarahta. *See* King Hendrick.
Soi it inu, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census. v. 488
Sokchit. *See* So-kéa-keit.
So-kéa-keit, a Trinity River village, III, 139
Sokokies, location, III, 512
  See also Sacos.
So-ko-pe-chi, Chief, III, 404
Sokulk, location, III, 570
  population, III, 570; v, 706
  See also Lokulk.
Soledad, population of, I, 520
Solis, Don Antonio, I, 19
Solomon, dispatch of vessels by, v, 88
Somers, Sir George, VI, 96
Songs, bewailing the dead, IV, 71; VI, 621
  brevity of, III, 231
  Carib, words and music of, II, 312
  character, III, 326; IV, 71
  Cherokee, of friendship, v, 564
  children's, to firefly, v, 564
  Chippewa, music of, v, 562
    words of, v, 559–564
  corn husking, v, 563–564
  lack, among the Sioux, VI, 70
  literal translations, v, 559–564
  magic, words of, II, 223
  mnemonic devices used for, I, 401–411; VI, 606
  of Anacoana, II, 309, 312
  of death, II, 62
  of love, Chippewa, v, 559–562
  of love, symbols of, I, 403–404
  of the Frog, III, 329
  of the medicine man, v, 439
  of the Midawin, v, 429, 430, 431
  of victory, II, 60–61
  of war, 59, 60, 61–62; v, 562
  preserved in carved wood, I, 112
  recorded by symbols, I, 335, 339; IV, 251; v, 245
  sung to children, IV, 72
  symbols of, explained, I, 368–380
  symbols for, illustrated, I, 361, 373
  use of music-boards in, I, 361
  use in incantations, v, 397
  use in worship, IV, 71–72
  Wabeno, pictographs of, VI, 397
    synopsis of, I, 380–381
  with translations, v, 611–612
  words and meaning of, I, 362–366, 368–380
  See also Chants; Hymns; Music.

Song-uk-um-ig, brief biography of, II, 166–167

Sonoma Valley, Indian population of, III, 634
    origin of name of, III, 421

Sonontwheronons, a synonym of Senecas, IV, 207

Soocheah, derivation of the name, IV, 381

Soos, brief account of, III, 560
    warriors, III, 566
    See also Dakota.

Sopete, Spaniards warned by, IV, 30

Soquamish. *See* Suquamish.

Soquoiah, reference to ancestry of, V, 102
    See also Sequoia.

Sorcerers, classification of, II, 224
    harm done by, IV, 637

Sorcerer's bowls, described and illustrated, IV, 492–494

Sorcery, belief in, of the Dacotahs, III, 225
    See also Witchcraft.

Soshawnese (Soshonees), IV, 551
    country occupied by, III, 597
    population, III, 597
    See also Shoshonees.

Sosokos, bands of, among the "Diggers," V, 199

Sougohatchee, derivation of the name, IV, 381

Souharissen, chief of the Neutral Nation, IV, 205

Souhegan River, Indians of, V, 221

Souhegans, origin of the name, V, 221
    subservient to Pennacooks, VI, 222

Souikilas, III, 559
    warriors, estimate of, III, 557, 559

Soul, beliefs concerning, I, 33, 83, 87; III, 60, 229, 232; IV, 70, 225, 665; V, 79; VI, 637–638, 658, 664
    dual nature of, VI, 664, 665
    of animals, belief in, V, 408
    See also Spirits, of the dead.

Souriquois, cooking methods, I, 81
    population, I, 524; VI, 689
    reference to language of, III, 512
    See also Micmacs.

Souteus, a synonym of Chippeway, III, 556

South Bay, Indians of, VI, 703
    population, V, 491

South Carolina, antiquities from, illustrated, VI, 74, 179
    antiquities of, IV, 155–169, 170–172
    archeological remains in, II, 88–89; VI, 182
    arrival of Ribault in, VI, 73
    attempts to colonize, III, 24–27
    Indian lands in, III, 583, 586; V, 480
    number of Indians in, III, 583, 586; V, 480
    occupation of, VI, 179
    population and area, IV, 610
    tribes of, V, 42; VI, 31–32

Southampton River, Indians of, V, 37

South Kingston, R. I., Indian fort at, VI, 162

South Yanktons, a Yankton band, II, 169

Sowahagen Indians, Eliot's preaching to, V, 233
    territory occupied by, V, 233

Sowans, VI, 689
    census of, VI, 556
    location, VI, 556, 695
    population, VI, 695

Sow-a-to, Caddo name for Comanches, II, 126

Sow-er-ette, chief of Uinta Utahs, IV, 596

Sow ga hatch cha, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578

So woc co lo, a Lower Creek town, IV, 578

Soyennow. *See* Sagennom.

Spaniards, atrocities practiced by, II, 311
    Indian revolt against, V, 206
    policy toward Indians, III, 23–24

Spanish explorations, VI, 38–39; 44–47

Spanish Hill, embankments on, V, 667

Sparks, Col. Richard, IV, 629–632
    Chief Logan discussed by, IV, 631
    Cresap exonerated by, VI, 264, 265
    Shawnee captive, IV, 623, 625
    statement of, IV, 623–625, 627–629

Spear heads, description of, IV, 159
    illustration of, III, 468
    preparation of flints for, III, 467

Spears, description and use of, I, 87, 213; II, 515; III, 214
    illustrations of, II, 516; III, 214

Species, use of the term, IV, 354

Speeches, of Elskatawa, IV, 259–262
  of Logan, IV, 615
  of Thanayeison, IV, 256
  of Wabashaw, IV, 258–259
  See also Oratory.
Spelman, Peter, mission of, to Sir William Johnson, VI, 132
Spindle, ancient use of, VI, 610
  use by Aztecs, IV, 441–443
Spinning, aboriginal periods indicated by, IV, 138–139
  among the Caribs, IV, 443
  Aztec method, IV, 441–442
  Pueblo, illustrated, VI, 71
  See also Weaving.
Spirits, beliefs concerning, III, 231, 232-233; IV, 636; V, 72–75
  evil, belief in, IV, 329, 490–491; V, 404–405
  exorcism of, VI, 619, 620
  explanation of numbers of, V, 416
  good and evil, belief in, V, 407–408; VI, 658–659
  intercessors with, IV, 638
  of ancestors, belief concerning, V, 104
  of the dead, II, 195, 199; IV, 78
  worship of, III, 492
  See also Dryads; Guardian Spirits; Manitos.
Spoak oak hargo, a Creek chief, IV, 576
Spoak oake micco, a Creek chief, IV, 576
Spokan. *See* Spokanes.
Spokanes (Spokans), III, 632; VI, 687
  maps showing location, III, 96, 200
  marriage customs, V, 654
  nature of lands of, V, 656
  population, I, 521; V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 700, 701
  territory occupied by, V, 490
  See also Larlielo; Sinhumanish.
Spoon, Indian, illustration of, I, 103
Sprague, Capt. John T., census report of, I, 522
Spring, sacred, in the Navajo country, IV, 213
Springfield, Mass., Indian attack on, VI, 160
Squahsinawmish (Squaks'namish), brief account of, V, 700
  census, V, 704
  See also Quash-sua-mish.
Squai-aitl, a Sa-wa-wish band, V, 703
  location, V, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 703; VI, 703
Squaks'namish. *See* Squahsinawmish.
Squalliamish (Squalli-ah-mish, Squally-ah-mish, Squallyamish), bands of, V, 703
  brief account of, V, 701
  census, V, 704
  language, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598; V, 703; VI, 703
  population, IV, 598; V, 703; VI, 701, 703
Squalli-ah-mish. *See* Squalliamish.
Squally-ah-mish. *See also* Nisqually; Oualliamish; Skwalz; Squalliamish; Squallyamish.
Squam, origin of name, V, 221
Squamacross, population of, V, 706
  See also Squannaroos.
Squamsauke, origin of name, V, 221
Squamscotts, derivation of name, V, 222–223
  location, V, 223
  members of Pennacook Confederacy, V, 222
Squa-na-mish, language of, IV, 600
  location, IV, 598
  population, IV, 598
Squannaroos, location of, III, 572
  population, III, 572
  See also Squamacross.
Squares, public, Creek, described, V, 264–265
  diagram showing, V, 264
  use of, V, 265
Squaxon. *See* Quash-sua-mish; Squahsinawmish.
Squeailips (Squiaelps), population of, I, 521; VI, 701
  See also Ponderas
Squiaelps. *See* Squeailips.
Squiatl. *See* Squai-aitl.
Squier, Ephraim G., discussion of work of, IV, 116
  reference to work of, I, 47
Squier, E. G., and Davis, Dr., work of, VI, 602
Squinamish, a Skagit division, V, 704
  location, V, 704; VI, 703
  population, V, 704; VI, 703

Srootlema-mish, language of, IV, 600
    location, IV, 598
    population, IV, 598
    See also Shotlemamish.
Stafford, Captain, mission of, VI, 92
Staitan. *See* Marlain.
Staktamish (Staktomish), brief account of, V, 701
    census, V, 704
Stanley, Mr., Indian population estimated by, VI, 698
Stansbury, Capt., III, 493; IV, 252
Starling, E. A., report of, IV, 598–602
Stars, beliefs concerning, I, 271, 272; III, 276
    Indian knowledge of, III, 228
    See also Constellation.
Statements, financial, by Indian Office, II, 561–564; IV, 569–570
    of Creek annuities, IV, 571
    of investments by Creeks, IV, 571
    regarding public lands, II, 590–592
Statistical tables concerning Indians, III, 553–634
Statistics, and population, II, 545–608; IV, 565–610; V, 479–506
    concerning Indians of upper Mississippi, III, 562–569
    difficulties in obtaining, I, 436
    fiscal, relating to Indians, VI, 719–725
    of education and Christianity, VI, 731–741
    of fur trade, VI, 726–730
    vital and industrial, I, 439–524
Stature of American Indians, II, 317–318; IV, 349–350
Staughton, Capt., part taken by, in Pequot War, VI, 122
Staved Rock, V, 192
Stealing. *See* Theft.
Steam-bath. *See* Sweat-house; Vapor-bath.
Steatite, pipes made of, V, 178
Stehchasamish, a Sawamish band, V, 703
    location, V, 703; VI, 703
    population, V, 703; VI, 703
    See also Stitchassamish.
Stehllum, a S'kallam band, V, 703
    location, V, 703; VI, 703
    population, V, 491, 703; VI, 703
Stehtlum. *See* Stehllum.
Stehtsasamish. *See* Steh-cha-sa-mish; Stitchassamish.
Steilacoom, IV, 599
Steilacoomish (Steil-a-coom-a-mish), location, V, 491, 703; VI, 703
    population, V, 491, 703; VI, 703
Stem, Jesse, reports by, III, 635; VI, 699
Stephens, John L., petition signed by, III, 618
Stephens and Catherwood, antiquities described by, VI, 582
Steppes or terraces of western New York, I, 163–165
Sterility among Indians, III, 211
Sterling, Capt., II, 307–308
Stetson, L., petition signed by, III, 618
Stevens, Gov. I. I., V, 50
    expedition under, IV, 181
    population report by, V, 703, 704, 705; VI, 698, 700
    reference to survey by, V, 664, 665
    report of, on the Blackfeet, VI, 698–699
    report of, quoted, VI, 612
Stevens, W. J., III, 155
Stevenson, Andrew, communication addressed to, III, 588
Stewart, H. H., acknowledgment to, III, 375
Stietshoi (Stietshos), maps showing location of, III, 96, 200
    See also Stitswish.
Stietshos. *See* Stietshoi.
Stikeen, tribes trading at, V, 489
Stikeen Indians, V, 489
    census, V, 489
    divisions, V, 489
    language, V, 489
Stikine. *See* Stikeen.
Stiles, Dr., VI, 602
Stilla-qua-mish, language, IV, 600
    location, IV, 598
    population, IV, 598
    See also Stoluchwamish.
Stillman, Maj., retreat of, before Black Hawk, VI, 451
Stitchassamish (Stitcheosawmish), brief account of, V, 700
    See also Stehchasamish.
Stitcheo-saw-mish, language of, IV, 600
    location, IV, 598
    population, IV, 598
    See Stitchassamish.

Stitcheycornoleo, of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
St-ka-mish, location of, V, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 703; VI, 703
Stockaded works encountered by De Soto, IV, 124
Stockbridge language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341
Stockbridges, VI, 488, 687, 689
  admitted to Delaware bands, IV, 572
  also called Mohegans, V, 41
  at Canandaigua convocation, VI, 326
  census, III, 621–628
  classification, V, 145
  condition, after removal, VI, 542, 544
  conference with, V, 667
  country occupied by, VI, 705
  funds required for, II, 573
  in Kanzas, payments made to, VI, 720
  location, III, 583; V, 495; VI, 504
    map showing, III, 96
  migrations, VI, 504, 505
  missing work among, VI, 734, 737, 738
  name for Mohicans, VI, 324
  on Delaware lands, IV, 572
  original home, V, 495
  population, I, 524; III, 583; IV, 572; V, 495; VI, 689, 705, 707
  received by the Oneidas, IV, 563
  reference to dialect of, III, 96
  removal, VI, 536
    condition after, VI, 542, 544
  See also Housatonics; Stockbridges, West; Stockbridges and Munsees.
Stockbridges, West, census of, I, 488–497
  geographical position, I, 488
Stockbridges and Munsees, fiscal statistics relating to, VI, 722
  investments for, II, 563
  population, VI, 707
  removal, II, 551; IV, 463
  See also Stockbridges; Munsees.
Stoicism, absence of among Klamath River Indians, III, 176
  Indian characteristic, III, 58, 212
  Indian, III, 245; IV, 54; V, 56, 105
  See also Imperturbability.
Stoluchwamish, location of, V, 704; VI, 703
  population of, V, 491, 704; VI, 703
  See also Stilla-qua-mish.
Stone, Charles, murder of, III, 109
Stone, Col. W. L., biographer of Joseph Brant, IV, 345, 526
Stone, Aztec sacrificial, description of, VI, 586
Stone, sculptured, Mexican, VI, 579, 585–587
  pipes of, I, 72–75
  See also Inscriptions.
Stone bill. *See* Mace.
Stone Giants. *See* Stonish Giants.
Stone heaps, a memorial to the dead, IV, 156
  purpose of, V, 104; VI, 613
  significance of, III, 174
  supposed use of, III, 206
Stone mirrors of the Peruvians, described, V, 91–92
Stones, discoidal, description of, I, 82–83
  illustration of, I, 86
  painted, symbolic use of, III, 229
  perforated, I, 170
Stones and story telling. *See* Tales.
Stonestreet, Rev. Charles, V, 699
Stonework. *See* Implements; Pipes; Tubes; Weapons.
Stonington, Mohegans at, I, 524
Stonington Indians, land claimed by, III, 583
  location, III, 583
  population, III, 583
Stonish (Stone) Giants, description of, I, 430
  illustration showing, I, 430
  Indian name for mail-clad men, I, 430
  legend of, V, 637, 642
Stonoes, subordinate tribe of the Catawbas, VI, 179
Story, Judge, V, 104
  name suggested by, V, 287
Strahlenberg, inscriptions copied from, I, 424
Straits of Fuca, Indians of, VI, 703
Streams diminishing toward outlet, I, 208

"Striking the Post," ceremony of, III, 64
  illustration of, III, 64
Strong, Leonard, signer of Indian treaty, VI, 144
Strong-bows, V, 179
  an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
  population of, II, 27
Strong Ground, II, 161, 162
Strope, Sebastian, family of, captured by Indians, V, 670
Structures, Indian, V, 391–393
Strut, J. M., III, 377
Stuart, Capt., saved by Attakullakulla, VI, 241
Stump, Stoffel, IV, 325, 330, 335, 340
Sualatine (Sualtine), population of, I, 521, VI, 689, 701
Subsistence. *See* Food; Clothing; Dwellings.
"Succutash," an Indian dish, I, 80
Suchamier (Suckamier) Indians, I, 521; VI, 689
Sudbury, attacked by Indians, VI, 165
Sugar camp, illustration of, II, 59
Sugar-Eaters. *See* Penointik-ara.
Sugarmaking described, II, 55–56
Sugar-pines, description of, III, 154–155
Sug-waum-dug-ah-win-ine-wug, separation of, from Ojibwas, II, 139
Suiaton and Wapaton Sioux, population of, VI, 707
Suicide, causes of, V, 272
Sukkwan. *See* Shou a gan.
Sullivan, Gen., expedition commanded by, VI, 308–311
  fort erected by, V, 667
  Indians defeated by, V, 667
  result of expedition of, VI, 312
Sumach, use of, IV, 243
Sumdum. *See* Tako, Samdan and Sitka Indians.
Sumner, Col., expedition of, IV, 210
Sumonpavi, population of, I, 519
Sun, as a symbol of deity, V, 407
  belief concerning, I, 271; IV, 236, 239; V, 416
  dance to, IV, 63
  pictorial representations of, V, 402
  reference to supplications to, V, 69
  symbols of, in pictography, VI, 629
  temple to, V, 89
Sun dance, performance of, IV, 63
Sunday, John, the evangelist, I, 396
Sundown, mention of trial of, for murder, V, 669
Sunkive fork, fortifications on, VI, 613
Sunrise, mention of ceremony at, V, 170
Sunset Indians, a synonym of Natchez, V, 260
Sun worship, I, 30; VI, 626–630
  among Aztecs and Toltecs, III, 60
  among tribes of United States region, III, 227; V, 103–104
  as evidence of Toltec influence, IV, 148
  at Cuzco, V, 94
  ceremony of, V, 68
  evidence of prevalence of, V, 63–64
  explained by Indian prophet, IV, 639
  foundation of Indian religion, V, 29
  illustration showing, III, 227
  in Mexico, V, 103
  indicating Indian origin, V, 69
  north of Mexico, VI, 592–593
  northward trend of, IV, 123
  of American Indians, IV, 664–665
  of Florida tribes, V, 99
  of Peruvians, reference to, V, 63
  of the Natchez, IV, 123; V, 68
  origin of, I, 30
  songs indicating, V, 64
  spread of, V, 30
  widespread practice of, IV, 639
Superstitions, of the Algonquins, VI, 658–663
  See also Beliefs.
Suquamish (Soquamish, Su-qua-mish), and Toanda, population of, V, 705
  brief account of, V, 700
  census, V, 704
  location, V, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 703; VI, 703
Surgery, of the Winnebagoes, IV, 243
Sursees. *See* Sarsees.
Survey of Northern Railroad Route, V, 665
Sus ke ne hau of Tuck a bat cha Town, IV, 575
Susquehanna, Indian pronounciation of, V, 669
Susquehanna River, Indians of, V, 38, 137, 138, 668; VI, 714

Susquehannah Valley, difficulties of settlers in, IV, 618
  tribes of, IV, 617
Susquehannas (Susquehannocks), IV, 617; V, 122; VI, 105
  brief description of, VI, 128
  colony in territory of, VI, 744
  extermination, V, 137; VI, 130, 145
  final disposition, VI, 136
  history, VI, 134–136, 142–145
  hostilities, with colonists, VI, 143
  identical with Conestogues, VI, 138
  land ceded by, VI, 144
  language, VI, 140, 141
  name, discussion of, VI, 177
  population, VI, 131
  synonym of Andastes, VI, 138
  territory claimed by, VI, 134
    occupied by, V, 38; VI, 32, 131
  See also Andastes; Conestogo.
Susquehannocks. *See* Susquehannas.
Sussees. *See* Sarsees.
Sussetons (Susseeton, Sussetonwah), a division of the Sioux, II, 168, 169; III, 612
  synonym of the Sissetons, VI, 689
  See also Sissitons.
Suwanee River, probable derivation of name, III, 29
Swagatchey, tribe dwelling at, VI, 714
Swamscot, origin of name, V, 221
Swan, Maj. Caleb, account by, of Creek Indians, V, 251–283
  Creek arts described by, V, 691–693
  Creek towns listed by, VI, 369
  journal of, V, 253–254
  reference to visit of, to the Creeks, V, 660
Swan, James G., burial customs described by, VI, 619–623
Swan Creek and Black River Chippewas, IV, 461
  population of, I, 524; VI, 689
Sweat bath. *See* Vapor-bath.
Sweat-house, Clear Lake Indian, described, III, 107
  See also Vapor-bath lodge.
Swedish colony on the Delaware, VI, 137
Swedish settlement, purchase of land for, VI, 142
Sweet potato. *See* Batata.
Sweet-water Valley, described, I, 201
Swegachi Indians, VI, 230
Swiss missionaries, labors of, V, 697
Swo-da-mish, a Skagit division, V, 704
  location, V, 704; VI, 703
  population, V, 704; VI, 703
Sybert's Fort, Shawnee massacre of garrison at, VI, 300
Symbolism, in pictographs, II, 68
  in worship, II, 68
  of black, II, 68
  of the serpent, V, 105
Symbols, animal, use of, III, 273
  use of, by Indians, IV, 251–252; V, 245
  use of, in heraldry and records, III, 273
  use of, to convey messages, 306–308
  See also Pictographs.
Symbols, mnemonic, for music, II, 226–228
  for music, illustrated, II, 228
  use of, I, 401–411
  See also Mnemonic devices.
Symington, Rev. R. S., acknowledgment to, III, 376
Syphilis, treatment for, IV, 515

T

Tabah-téa, language of, III, 112
Tabeau, M., III, 355
Tab-hu-sca, Chief, IV, 540
Tabittikis, number of warriors of, III, 555
  See also Abittibi.
Taboos, among the Sioux, II, 175
  concerning food, IV, 214
  concerning names, II, 196
  concerning names of the dead, IV, 226; VI, 633
  concerning species of hawk, III, 273
  Dacotah, III, 230
  during busk ceremonials, V, 268
  food, California Indians, V, 215, 217
    Clear Lake Indians, III, 113
    Wee-yot, III, 128
  menstrual, III, 227, 230; V, 70, 271
  strict observance of, III, 243
  See also Catamenial customs.
Tacco, tribes visiting, V, 489
Taccully. *See* Tacullies.
Taciturnity, an Indian trait, III, 59
Tacitus, quoted on the Silures, V, 34
Taconnet. *See* Taughtanakagnes.

Tacquimenon River, census of Indians of, I, 458-467
Tachies, classification of, III, 402
Tacullies (Taccully, Tahculi, Tecullies, Tucullies), an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
  classification, III, 401
  cremation practiced by, I, 102; V, 29, 59
  population, II, 28
Ta-eeteetan, a Stikeen River tribe, V, 489
  census, V, 489
Taensa, mention of language of, V, 99
Tagas, location, VI, 710
Tahculi or Carriers. *See* Tacullies.
Tah-ga-yu-ta, Indian name for Logan (q. v.), IV, 616, 647
Tahlequah, report on Bible Society at, IV, 589
Tah-le-wah language, vocabulary of, III, 440–445
Tah-le-wah vocabulary, possible use of, III, 422
Tah-le-wahs. *See* Tol-e-wahs.
Tahlkoedi. *See* Talquatee.
Tah-wac-car-ros (Tah-wae-carras), name for Comanches, II, 126
  population of, I, 518; VI, 708
  See also Tawakoni.
Tah-wae-carras. *See* Tah-wac-car-cos.
Taignoagny, a captive Iroquois, VI, 54, 55
Taikus. *See* Tagas.
Tai-tin-a-pam (Taitinapan, Tintinapain), V, 490
  location, V, 490, 703; VI, 703
  population, V, 490, 703; VI, 703
Takawaros, treaty with, VI, 489
  See also Tawakoni.
Takimilding. *See* Up-le-goh.
Tako, Samdan and Sitka Indians, census of, V, 489
Taku. *See* Tako.
Takug, Chief, Hurons led by, at Siege of Detroit, II, 281
Takulli. *See* Tacullies.
Takuxkanxkan, a Dakotah god, VI, 651
  description of, IV, 645
Talassehatchi. *See* Tal le se hatch ee.
Talatui, an upper California language, III, 402
Tales, Indian, analysis of, V, 246
  mind revealed by, V, 411
Tales, telling of, III, 233, 314, 492; IV, 70
  transformation the basis of, VI, 662
  See also Allegory; Legends; Origin traditions.
Talise, a fortified village, IV, 124
  a synonym for Tallisee (q. v.), II, 34
Talladega (Talledega), a Creek town, IV, 576, 578
  battle at, VI, 367, 370, 379
  leading men of, IV, 576
Tallageewi (Tallagewy; Talligewi), a name for the Alleghans, V, 98, 133
  identified as Cherokee, II, 36; VI, 33
  See Tallagewy.
Tallagewy. *See also* Allegans; Cherokee.
Tallahassee, derivation of the name, IV, 381
  wintering place of De Soto, III, 40
Tallapoosa (Tallapoosee) River, battles on, with Indians, VI, 371–372, 402
  description of, V, 256–257
Tallapoosa River region, Indians of, VI, 32
Tal la se hatch ee (Tullushatches town), an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
  battle at, VI, 367, 370, 379
Tal la se mic co, chief of Hatcheechubba, IV, 580
Tallassees, attitude of, in Seminole War, VI, 469
Talledega. *See* Talladega.
Tallequah, general council at, I, 277
Tallialtus, chief of the Maquelnoten, VI. 702
Talligewi. *See* Tallageewi.
Tal lip se hogy, an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Tallisee (Talisee), an Upper Creek town, IV, 575, 578
  chiefs of, IV, 575
  derivation of name, IV, 380
Tallmadge, James, petition signed by, III, 618
Tally, Chief, IV, 593
Tally's band, robbed of horses, IV, 593

Talmachussa, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
Talmanetesa, chief of the Tototen, vi, 702
Tal marse har jo, a Coweta Town chief, iv, 579
Tal qua tee, a Stikeen River tribe, v, 489
  census, v, 489
Tamajabs, iii, 298
Tamanend, iii, 57
Tamarais. *See* Tamaroas.
Tamaroas (Tamarais, Tamorois), annuities of, ii, 588
  missionary work among, vi, 734, 735
  warriors, number of, iii, 555
Tamaulipas, antiquities in, vi, 581
Tamenund. *See* Tammany.
Tammany (Tamenund), v, 121
  a Manhattan, v, 130
  country ruled by, vi, 744
Tamor of Sathoual, pictograph made by, i, 430
Tamorois. *See* Tamaroas.
Tampa, Fla., arrival of De Soto at site of, vi, 59
Tampa Bay, De Soto's name for, iii, 35
  landing place of Narvaez, iii, 28
  Narvaez' name for, iii 35,
Tanacharisson, Chief, vi, 224, 237
  friend of the English, vi, 219, 228
  friendly to Virginians, vi, 278
  meeting with Washington, vi, 213, 214
Tan-a-kee, Shoshoni chief, v, 198
Tanico, vi, 66
  probable location of, iv, 315
Tanima. *See* Ten-a-wish.
Tanner, John, account of life of, iv, 536
  Gospel translated by, iv, 536–537
Tanning of leather, unknown to Indians, iii, 66
Tanochtitlan, founding of, vi, 596
Tanoque, Indian name for Galisteo, iii, 298
Tanoquevi, population of, i, 519
  See also Harno.
Tansauhot-dinneh, the Copper-mine Indians, iii, 542
Tantos. *See* Tontos.
Taoapa. *See* Little Six's band.
Taos, iv, 216
  Braba identified as, iv, 39
  language of, v, 689
  population, i, 519; iii, 633; vi, 689, 697, 709
  See also Braba.
Taos Indians, emigration of, iv, 221
Taos Utahs, a division of the Utahs, vi, 697
Tapanses (Tappensees), location of, vi, 147
  origin, vi, 116
Tappan (Tappensees). *See* Tapanses.
Tapuyas, location of, iii, 533
Tarenyawago(n), i, 13, 18; iii, 528
  an Iroquois divinity, v, 157; vi, 188
  Iroquois belief concerning, v, 75
  story of, iii, 314–317
  See also Tau-lon-ghy-au-wan-goon.
Tarhe, Shawnee chief, at treaty negotiations, vi, 330
  called "the Crane," vi, 344
  condemned to stake, iv, 258
  death of, v, 141; vi, 353
  treaty signed by, vi, 344
Tarranteens. *See* Tarratines.
Tarratines (Tarranteens, Tarrenteens, Terentines, Tarentines), a name given to Micmacs, v, 219
  enemies of Pennacooks, v, 231
  listed by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
  name for the Abenakis (Abinaqui), iii, 513; vi, 174
  war of extermination waged by, v, 219
  See also Abnaki.
Tartary, inscriptions of, i, 424
Tascalusa (Tascaluza). *See* Tuscaloosa.
Tash-huan-ta, a Trinity River village, iii, 139
Tatobam, vi, 111
Tatsanottine. *See* Copper-mine Indians.
Tattooed People, Arapaho name for themselves, v, 496
Tattooing, among the Bonaks, iv, 223
  among the Wee-yot, iii, 127
  custom of, iii, 220
  of the Klamath, iii, 142, 175
  tribes practicing, v, 216

Taughtanakagnes, listed by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Tau-lon-ghy-au-wan-goon, myth concerning, vi, 668–670
Tawacanies (Tawacarros, Tawakeroes), brief account of, i, 239–240
  classification, iii, 402
  population, vi, 689
  See also Tawakoni.
Tawacarros. *See* Tawacanies.
Tawackguano, a synonym of Nanticokes (q. v.), vi, 131
Ta-wai-ta, Chief, v, 653
Tawakeroes. *See* Tawacanies.
Tawakoni. *See* Tah-wac-carros; Takawaros; Tawacanies; Towacarros; Towekas; Yo-woc-o-nees.
Tawanaheh, an Osage chief, iv, 274
Ta-wan-e-ars, Indian name of Governor Blacksnake, v, 673
Tawanima, an Arkansas village, iii, 537
Tawas, brief account of, iii, 560
  estimate of warriors, iii, 560
  See also Ottawas.
Tawasas, a Creek town, v, 262
Tawehash. *See* Torinash; Tow-e-ash.
Taw-nee-nuk-kaw (Taw-ne-nuk-kaw), an account of, iv, 235
  tradition related by, iv, 230
  Winnebago war chief, iv, 51
Taw-nu-nuk's Band, census of, i, 498–507
Taw warsa, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
Taxes, paid in cotton, iv, 443–444
  See also Tribute.
Taylor, Gen., vi, 476
Taylor, Zachary, Fort Harrison defended by, vi, 359
Tay-waugh language, pueblos speaking, v, 689
Tchai-noh, a Klamath River village, iii, 150
Tcho-ko-yem, a band of Sonoma Valley, iii, 421
Tcho-ko-yem language, vocabulary of, iii, 428–434
Tcho-lo-lah, name for Bald Hill Indians (q. v.), iii, 139
Tchuckti, classification of, iv, 559
Tchudi, opinion of, regarding Peruvian skulls, ii, 326
Tchuktchi, dialect of, ii, 28
Teananstayae, a Huron town, iv, 206
Tecarahaga, meaning of term, iii, 62; iv, 480–481
Tecomimoni, iii, 556
  number of warriors, iii, 556
Tecpanecs of Acapulco, Chichemecas displaced by, v, 95
  chronology of dynasty of, v, 97
Tecpanics, iii, 515
Tecullies. *See* Tacullies.
Tecumseh, i, 17–18; iii, 57, 59; iv, 115, 557; v, 139, 141; vi, 248, 449, 647
  activities of, iv, 258, 259
  actual position of, iv, 481
  at Detroit, vi, 382
  death of, in battle, vi, 363
  doctrine of, v, 151
  influence of, iii, 279; vi, 365
  opposition to advance of Whites, v, 45
  protests to British generals, vi, 363
  war instigated by, vi, 357–363, 374
Tediscund, a Delaware chief, vi, 132
Teepee. *See* Lodge.
Tehona, a synonym of Tigonex, iv, 40
Tehoseroron, Indian name for Buffalo, N. Y., iv, 563
  meaning of name, iv, 563
Tejas (Teyans, Teyas), country inhabited by, iv, 37
  guides for Coronado, iv, 31
  identified as Comanches, iv, 35
  map showing location, iv, 39
  name of Texas derived from, iv, 35
  probable identity, iv, 35
  See also Texas tribes.
Tejon Reservation, condition of Indians on, vi, 715–716
  population, vi, 715
Tejuas, at Moqui village, iii, 298
  color of, iii, 298
  map showing location of, iii, 96
  See also Tesuque.
Telhuemit, population of, vi, 702
Temple, Natchez, ceremony at, v, 170
  description of, vi, 627
Temple, Sir Thomas, land granted to, v, 675
Temples, northern limit of, iv, 123
Tenaktak. *See* Tenuckttan.
Tenawa, a Comanche division, i, 230; v, 575
  region occupied by, i, 230

Ten Broeck, Dr. P. G. S., v, 203
  extracts from journal of, iv, 72–91
  Zuñi population estimated by, v, 484
Tennent, Wm., missionary work of, vi, 734
Tennessee, admission of, to the Union, vi, 393
  Indian lands in, iii, 584, 586
  Indian population of, iii, 584, 586; v, 481
  population and area of, iv, 610
Tennessee River, former name of, vi, 238
Tenpenny Utahs, a division of the Utahs, vi, 697
  population of, vi, 697
  See also Timbabachis.
Tensaw, Creek attack on fort at, vi, 362
Tenskwatawa. *See* Elskwatawa.
Tenuchtitlan, founding of, vi, 742
Te-nuckt-tau, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census of, v, 488
Tenuskund, reference to speech of, vi, 300
Teocalli, meaning of the name, v, 29
  mounds likened to, ii, 83, 84
Te-ok-a-wilk, hill tribe near Humboldt Bay, iii, 133
Teotl, the Aztec Creator, iv, 664
Teotoguiaton, a town of the Neutral Nation, iv, 207
Teoyaomiqui, a Mexican goddess, vi, 645
  idol, illustrated, vi, 636
Tepia (wild rice), illustration showing gathering of, vi, 552
  search for, vi, 617
Terentines. *See* Tarratines.
Terms of relationship, applied to tribes, i, 265, 268
  by marriage, ii, 131
  peculiarities of, ii, 50
Ter-ret-e-ma, at Shoshone peace council, iv, 596
Terry, David, report on missions signed by, v, 700
Tescocans, vi, 596
Tesuque (Tusuque, Zesuqua), language of, v, 689
  population, iii, 633; vi, 689, 709
  vocabulary from, iii, 446–459
  See also Tejuas.
Tetans. *See* Tetons.
Têtes de Boule (Tete Bouleos), iii, 556
  also called Nopemings, v, 41
  country occupied by, iii, 559
  totems, iii, 556
  warriors, number of, iii, 553, 559
  See also Gens de Terre.
Tetons (Tetans), a Dakotah band, vi, 350
  census, vi, 556
  classification, iii, 402; vi, 689
  division of the Sioux nation, ii, 169
  fortifications, v, 100–101
    map of, v, 100
  language, iii, 563; v, 494
  leading men, iii, 569
  location, v, 494; vi, 556, 695
  other names for, iii, 563
  population, i, 524; iii, 563; v, 494; vi, 689, 695
  trade, iii, 564
  tribal relations, iii, 567
  warriors, number of, iii, 563
  See also Sioux of the Meadows; Titons.
Teu-a-wish, a Comanche division, ii, 127
  meaning of name, ii, 127
Te-ve-re-wena, Chief, band of, v, 201
  meaning of name, v, 201
Tewa. *See* Tejuas; Tesuque.
Tewa language. *See* Tay-waugh language; Tesuque.
Texanos, map showing location, ii, 28
  name for Texas tribes, ii, 343
Texas, Delawares in, v, 141
  Indian population, i, 518, 523; iii, 635; v, 483; vi, 708
  lack of aboriginal monuments in, iv, 115; v, 483
  law regarding Indians, vi, 708
  name, derivation of, iv, 35
  population and area, iv, 610
  relations of government, with the Indians, i, 240–241
  removal of tribes from, iv, 473
  tribes of, i, 518; vi, 34
    described, i, 229–241
  See also Texas tribes.

Texas tribes, account of v, 682–685
  classification, II, 343
  list of, I, 518
  missionary work among, VI, 734
  name for, VI, 34
  of Northern origin, VI, 699
  recommendations concerning, II, 557–558
  southwestern, census of, V, 702
  See also Tejas.
Teyans. *See* Tejas.
Teyas. *See also* Tejas.
Tezcocans (Tezcucons, Tezcucos), V, 106
  discussion of migration of, V, 101–102
  name for Acolhuans, V, 96
  Valley of Mexico occupied by, V, 95; VI, 596, 742
  See also Acalhuas.
Tezcucons. *See* Tezcocans.
Tezon (Tézou), VI, 69, 70
Tézou, death of, IV, 22
  tale of, by Seven Cities, IV, 22
Thames River, battle on, VI, 363
  former name of, VI, 117, 126
  Indians on, VI, 110
  naming of, VI, 124
Thanayeison, speech of, IV, 256
Thayendenegea (Thyendanagea), III, 57; VI, 313, 357
  Indian name of Brant, IV, 345, 481
  See also, Brant, Joseph.
"The Turk." *See* El Turco.
"The Weirs," V, 226
Theft, among the Navajoes, IV, 211, 217, 218
  among the Sioux, II, 191
  attitude toward, III, 191
  by children, II, 191
Thick Woodsmen, a branch of the Ojibwa, II, 139
Thla katch ka, a Lower Creek town, IV, 578
  chiefs of, IV, 579
Thlane hargo, of Che haw Town, IV, 576
Thla nootche aubaneau, derivation of name, IV, 380
Thlatlogulgau, derivation of name, IV, 381
Thlingchadinne. *See* Dog-ribbed tribes; Dogribs.
Thlingeha-dinneh, an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
Thlob thlocco (1st), an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Thlob thlocco (2d), an Upper Creek town, IV, 578
Thoma, Pierre, medal awarded to, V, 675
Thompson, Col., III, 294
Thompson, Indian Superintendent, VI, 470
  death of, VI, 471
Thompson, Jacob, report made by, III, 617
Thompson, Mr., of Gold Bluff, III, 145
Thorbrandsson, Snorre, IV, 119
Thorn Apple River band, census of, I, 478–487
Thorne, Capt., death of, II, 114
Thornton, Mr., population report by, VI, 701–702
Three Nations, tribes composing, VI, 132
Three Wells, earthquake at, II, 109
Throckmorton, deputy marshal, IV, 593
Thunder, dance to appease, IV, 63
Thunder Bay, Mich., unusual pipe found at, I, 74
Thunder-bird, ceremony of, illustrated, VI, 353
  Dacotah belief in, III, 233
  illustration of, II, (face 65, pl. 13, fig. 17)
  representation of, as ornament, II, 58
Thunderers, mythological warriors, V, 409
Thupenebu, treaty signed by, VI, 344
Thyendanagea. *See* Thayendenegea.
Tichenor, Capt., explorations of, III, 132
Ticonderoga, a Wyandot name, V, 521
  derivation of the name, IV, 384; V, 594
  meaning of name, III, 328
Tidal phenomena in the Great Lakes, I, 170
Tiedemann, opinion of, regarding Peruvian skulls, II, 326
Tigonex, Alvarado received at, IV, 26
  besieged by Spaniards, IV, 28
  Coronado at, IV, 27, 28, 31
  description of, IV, 27
  reached by Alvarado, IV, 26

- Tigonex—Continued
  - uncertain identification of, iv, 34, 39
  - *See also* E-nagh-magh.
- Tigua. *See* E-nagh-magh; Tigonex.
- Tihittan. *See* Ta ee tee tan.
- Tilhualwits (Tilhulhwit), population of, i, 521; iii, 632; vi, 689
  - *See also* Echeloot; Nishrams; Telhuemit.
- Tillamook language. *See* Killamuck language.
- Tillamooks, map showing location of, iii, 200
  - population, iii, 632; v, 492
  - *See also* Killamuchs; Nsirtshaus.
- Timagoon, vi, 74
- Timbabachis, map showing location of, iii, 96
  - *See also* Tenpenny Utahs.
- Timber Creek Indians, reference to, vi, 138, 142
- Time, reckoning of, v, 419
  - *See* Calender stone; Calender system.
- Timpaiarats. *See* Tenpenny Utahs; Timbabachis.
- Tin, in the Kansas Valley, i, 157–159; ii, 31
- Tintinapain. *See* Tai-tin-a-pam.
- Tioga, meaning of the name, iv, 383, 384; v, 594
- Tioga Point, conference held at, v, 667
- Tioga River, Indian name of, iv, 332
- Tioga village (Ty-o-ga), vi, 132
  - a former Indian council place, v, 670
  - *See also* Diahgo.
- Tionontates (Dionondades), vi, 232
  - location of villages of, iv, 204
  - *See also* Petun or Tobacco Indians.
- Tionontati. *See* Petun or Tobacco Indians; Tionontates.
- Tiorhaasery, an Algonquin chief, vi, 140
  - meaning of name, vi, 140
- Tipi. *See* Lodge.
- Tippecanoe, battle of, iv, 258; vi, 354–355
- Tipton, Gen. John, vi, 497
- Tish-râwa, a village on the Klamath River, iii, 150
- Titicaca, skulls of, ii, 327, 328
- Titons (Titonwan), a division of the Sioux, iii, 629
  - country occupied by, iii, 629
  - division, iii, 629
  - leading men, iii, 629
  - *See also* Tetons.
- Titonwan, a grand division of the Dacotas, i, 249
  - brief account of, i, 249
  - *See also* Titons.
- Tiun. *See* Too.
- Tkwakwamish. *See* T'qua-qua-mish.
- Tlaaluis. *See* Clallu e is.
- Tlakluit. *See* Echeloot; Nishrams; Tilhualwits.
- Tlalams, map showing location of, iii, 96
  - *See also* Clallams.
- Tlascalan [Aztec] (Tlascallans), iii, 515
  - cranial measurements of, ii, 335
- Tlascalan gateway, deductions drawn from, i, 65
  - use of principle of, v, 394
- Tlascani, classification of, iii, 401
  - *See also* Tlatskanai
- Tlatskanai. *See* Clackstar nation; Clatacamin; Tlascani.
- Tlauitsis. *See* Clow et sus.
- Tlelding. *See* A-hel-tah.
- Toak paf car, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
- Toak parf car Town, a Creek town, iv, 576
  - chief of, iv, 576
- Toanda and Suquamish, population of, v, 705
  - *See also* Toanhooch; Twana.
- Toanhooch, location of, v, 491, 703; vi, 703
  - population of, v, 491, 703; vi, 703
  - *See also* Twana.
- Tobacco, a gift of the Great Spirit, iv, 227
  - Algonquin name for, v, 65
  - American origin of, v, 65
  - buried with the dead, iv, 54
  - ceremonial use of, i, 31; iii, 227; iv, 141, 637, 639; v, 65; vi, 88, 628, 629.
  - grown on Lake Ontario, iv, 205
  - history and use, v, 65

Tobacco—Continued
  introduction, into England, v, 65; vi, 87
  origin of name, v, 65
    tradition of, iii, 538; iv, 343
  sacred character of, i, 72–73; iv, 141
  solace of the Indian, ii, 77; iii, 69
  symbolic use of, v, 393
  use, as an offering, i, 49
    as incense, vi, 109
  See also Pipes; Smoking customs.
Tobacco Indians, identified as Wyandots, iv, 203
  slaughter of, iv, 203
  totems, iv, 204
  See also Tionontates.
Tobacco plant, trend of migration shown by, iv, 115, 132
Tobacco pouches, illustrations, iii, 69
Tobar, Don Pedro de, expedition of, vi, 25, 38
Tockwaghs, a synonym of Nanticoke (q. v.), vi, 131
Tohopeka, battle of, vi, 372–373
Tohushaqueros, chief of the Cheattes, vi, 702
Tokais, a Cayuga chief, vi, 702
Tol-e-wahs, location of, iii, 139
  See also Tah-le-wah.
Tolheo, block-house at, iv, 325
  identification of, iv, 325
Tolmie, W. F., census taken by, v, 704
Tolowa. *See* Tah-le-wahs; Tol-e-wahs.
Tol o war thloc co, a Lower Creek town, iv, 578
Tol o war thlock o, a Lower Creek town, iv, 580
Toltec civilization, decadence of, v, 30
  elements of, in New Mexico, ii, 28
  probable reach of, i, 71
Toltec dynasty, chronology of, v, 95, 96
Toltec language, traces, in Muscogee names, iv, 381
Toltec migration, theory concerning, iv. 170
Toltecan epoch, state of art in, iv, 123
Toltecan family, cranial capacity, ii, 329
Toltecan nations, meaning of term, ii, 328
Toltecs, i, 63
  chronological data regarding, vi, 742
  civilization, discussion of, v, 29–31
  corn goddess of, vi, 631
  idolatry, i, 71, 72
  migrations, discussion of, v, 101–102
    evidence of northward, iv, 147–148
  monarchy of, i, 21
  mythology, vi, 636–646
  overthrow of empire, v, 61
  sun worship, iv, 639; v, 29
  Valley of Mexico reached by, vi, 742
  See also Mexican tribes.
Toma, Chief, pictographs on grave-posts of, i, 338
Tomahawk, description of, iv, 174
  illustration of, iv, 174, 175
  symbolic use of, vi, 448
  use and description of, i, 92–93
  See also Battle-axe.
Tomaso, a Diegueno chief, ii, 100
Tomb, royal, bones placed in, iv, 156–157
Tombe drum, description of, iv, 74
Tombigbee River, Indians on, vi, 32
Tomlinson, Abelard, mound exploration by, i, 120–121
Tomlinson, Jesse, mound on property of, i, 120
Tomlinson, Mr., cited on mound period, vi, 600
  reference to collection of, i, 75
Tom mastth micco of Tuck a batch cha Town, iv, 575
Tom-o-haw, information furnished by, ii, 169
Tonawanda, Onondagas at, vi, 706
  Senecas at, vi, 706
Tonawanda Reservation, census of, vi, 690
  location, vi, 690
Tonawandas, population of, vi, 689
Toncahiras (Tonkahiras), location of, vi, 689
  population of, i, 518; vi, 689, 708
  See also Tonkaways; Toukaways.
Tonewanta Reservation, described, ii, 540
Tongass Indians, v, 489
  census, v, 489
  location, v, 489

Tonkahiras. *See* Toncahiras.
Tonkawas, brief description of, I, 239
    location, III, 635; VI, 705
    population, I, 239; III, 635; VI, 705
    See also Toncahiras; Toukaways
Tonti, II, 30
Tontos (Apaches Tontos; Tantos), an Apache band, V, 203, 689
    origin of the name, V, 207
    range of, V, 207
    warriors, number of, V, 207
Too, census of, V, 489
    language, V, 489
    location, V, 489
Toohtogaufau, derivation of the name, IV, 381
Tookabatchians, at battle at Attasee, VI, 368
Too-ke-mah, Chief, band under, V, 201
Tools, judgment of arts by, I, 70–71
    use of, by Chinese, I, 70
    See also Implements.
Tooth-work, Chippewa art of, VI, 131
    illustrated, VI, 631
Topinabee, Chief (Topinabi), treaties signed by, VI, 394, 395
    Pottawattamies ruled by, VI, 386
    treaty signed by, VI, 344
Toquistineses Indians, IV, 555
Torinash, intermarriage with the Comanches, II, 126
Torquemada, cited on head flattening, II, 328
Tortoise, land. *See* Gofer.
Torture, of captive, illustration of, V, 78
    of Ojibwa chief, story of, II, 142
    of prisoners, I, 235; IV, 50
    See also Ordeals.
Tosconer fixico of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Toscororas. *See* Tuscaroras.
Totacaga, a Creek town, V, 262
Totant, mentioned by Captain John Smith, V, 218
Toteloes. *See* Tutelos.
Totem. *See* Totems.
Totemic animals, reason for respect shown to, III, 232
Totemic bond, discussion of, IV, 666
Totemic devices, pictograph of, VI, 606
Totemic mounds, explanation of, IV, 128, 666
Totemic symbols, uses of, V, 75–76
Totemism among the Iroquois, III, 195
Totems, I, 420; II, 49; V, 73–75
    among the Creeks, I, 275
    carved on pestle, III, 467
    clans represented by, I, 335
    derivation of the word, I, 420
    different from guardian spirits, V, 196
    families connected by, IV, 662
    found in inscriptions, IV, 666
    in sculptures and glyphs, IV, 666
    indicated by hair-cut, III, 268, 269
    individuals represented by, in pictographs, I, 417, 420
    Iroquois system of, V, 73
    marked on grave-post, I, 335, 336
    meaning of, I, 52; VI, 664
    of the Iowas, III, 268–269
    of the Ojibwas, II, 138
    of the Sioux, II, 170–171, 175
    origin, IV, 251
    property of clan or family, V, 196
    tribal divisions based on, V, 136
    use as signatures, II, 226; IV, 666
        by warriors, III, 557
    use of drawing of, V, 397
    See also Totemic symbols, and under tribal names.
To-ter-mitch, at Shoshone peace council, IV, 596
Totiris, III, 555
    number of warriors of, III, 555
    See also Catawbas.
Totonacas, goddess worshiped by, VI, 642
Totones, wars with, VI, 702
    See also Tototans.
Totonic Bands, location of, VI, 689
    population, VI, 689
    use of name, VI, 702
Totonic bands of southern Oregon, VI, 702
Tototans (Tototens; Tototins), V, 493
    census, V, 493
    divisions, V, 492-493
    location, V, 493; VI, 702
        maps showing, III, 96, 200
    population, V, 492–493; VI, 702
    Rogue River band, VI, 702
    See also Rogues; Totonic Bands; Tutoten.
Totten's Inlet, Indians of, VI, 703

Totten's Inlet Indians, population of, v, 491
Toukaways, origin myth of, v, 683
  Wolf dance of, v, 683
  See also Tonkawas.
Toulmin, Gen. Theo. L., iv, 630, 632
Toulmin, Harry, iv, 630
Toulmin, Judge, iv, 632
Towacarros (To-wac-o-nies, Towacoros, Towecarros, Towoekonies), iii, 403; vi, 687
  country occupied by, vi, 705
  dwellings, v, 682
  language, v, 682
  population, iii, 635; v, 702, 712; vi, 699, 705
  See also Tawakoni.
To-wac-o-nies. *See* Towacarros.
Towacoros. *See* Towacarros.
Tow-e-ash, brief account of, i, 239–240
Towecarros. *See* Towacarros.
Towekas, classification of, iii, 402
  See also Tawakoni.
Tower, stone, ruins of, at Newport, iv, 150–155
Town-criers among the Pueblos, iv, 77–78
Townsend, Dr., ii, 326
Towoekonies. *See* Towacarros.
T'qua-qua-mish, location of, v, 703; vi, 703
  population of, v, 703; vi, 703
Tracy, John, petition signed by, iii, 618
Trade, Indian, ii, 186–187, 526–528, 530–531, 550
  abuses in, i, 278
  articles used in, i, 84–85
  between Florida and Cuba, v, 95
  controlling influence of, vi, 350–352
  effects of, i, 279; ii, 188, 189, 526; iii, 208–209
  government policy regarding, vi, 345
  in copper, i, 67, 99; iv, 144
  in furs, result of, v, 33–34
  intertribal, materials used in, iv, 667; v, 108
    migration traced by, iv, 667
  mode of, between individuals, ii, 178
  routes of, i, 68; v, 144
  standard of value in, i, 84; ii, 178
  tribes linked by, i, 105
  under British rule, vi, 267–269
Trade—Continued
  use of credit in, ii, 527–528
  with the Creeks, i, 278–279
  with the Pillagers, v, 188
  See also Fur trade; Furs; Traders; Whiskey trade.
Traders, captured by Indians at Detroit, ii, 263
  class of, among the Creeks, v, 282
  early, in South Carolina, iv, 159
  importance of character of, iv, 214–215
Traders, or Odawas, origin of name, v, 145
  See also Ottawa.
Traditions. *See* Legends.
Trails, from St. Mary's to the Creek Nation, v, 256
  roads based on, iv, 318
  "Serra-goin" mention of, iii, 152
  See also Causeways; Oregon, route to; Warpath.
Transmigration of souls, an oriental idea, i, 38
  Chippewyan belief in, v, 174
  general belief in, i, 33
  Siouan lack of belief in, iii, 232
  See also Souls.
Transportation. *See* Canoes; Moving; Rafts; Traveling.
Traveling, customs of, v, 684
  illustration of, ii, 77
Traverse de Sioux band, listed as one of Seven Fires, ii, 169
Treat, Samuel, missionary work of, vi, 734, 735, 736
Treaties, at Hopewell, vi, 418
  at St. Peters, v, 188
  between Iroquois and State of New York, vi, 324
  between tribes, making of, iii, 263
  between Winnebago and United States, iii, 280
  Clear Lake, tribes at, iii, 109
  concluded by Col. Bradstreet, vi, 255, 299
  covering removal of tribes, vi, 416
  defining boundaries between tribes, vi, 421–423
  estimated expense of, v, 499–500
  first reliable record of, vi, 344
  Indian attitude toward, i, 232; vi, 365

- Treaties—Continued
  - Klamath River, for reservation on, iii, 145
  - made at Fond du Lac, i, 357; vi, 422
  - made at Prairie du Chien, i, 357; v, 526; vi, 421–422
  - made by Lord Dunmore, iv, 626; vi, 343
  - negotiated at Greenville, vi, 342–344
  - objected to by Pioneers, iv, 316–317
  - of Breda, Canadian lands ceded in, v, 675
  - of Buttes de Morts, i, 357; vi, 422
  - of 1854 and 1855, statement of, v, 497
  - of Fort Harmer, v, 141
  - of Fort Laramie, iv, 465, 470
  - of Fort M'Intosh, provision of, v, 141; vi, 303, 343
  - of Fort Pitt, commentary on, v, 140; vi, 305
  - of Fort Stanwix, v, 141
    - fraud charged in, v, 667–668
  - of Fort Wayne, v, 139
  - of Ghent, iv, 258, 259
  - of Greenville, era established by, vi, 344
    - land ceded in, v, 139, 142
  - of Lancaster, vi, 136
  - of New Echota, iv, 471; vi, 512–513
    - disagreement over, vi, 466–467, 474–475
  - of Painted Post, v, 668
  - of Seven River, vi, 144
  - of Utrecht, Canadian lands ceded in, v, 675
  - of Versailles, Indians neglected in, vi, 271, 320, 323
  - of Vincennes, v, 139
  - table giving data on, v, 499–500
  - tribes with, list of, iii, 609
  - tribes without, list of, iii, 609
  - violated by Navajoes, iv, 209
  - with Cayugas, vi, 324
  - with Chactaws (Choctaws), v, 572
  - with Cherokees, vi, 425
  - with Cheyenne, v, 573
  - with Chickasaws, v, 573; vi, 445
  - with Chippewas, vi, 393–395; 483–484, 505
  - with Chippewas and Ottowas, iv, 188
- Treaties—Continued
  - with Choctaws, provisions of, vi, 403
  - with Clear Lake Indians, iii, 106, 108, 109, 111
  - with Conestogoes or Andastes, vi, 140
  - with Creeks, v, 577; vi, 417, 418–419, 445
  - with Creeks and Seminoles, vi, 332
  - with Indians, adherence to, vi, 324
  - with Kickapoos, vi, 445
  - with Micmacs, v, 677
  - with Milicites, v, 675
  - with Ojibwas, ii, 166
  - with Oneidas, vi, 324
  - with Ottowas, vi, 393–395, 505
  - with Pottawattamies, vi, 393–395, 505
  - with Pottawattamies, Chippewas, and Ottowas, vi, 458
  - with Sacs and Foxes, vi, 448
  - with Seminoles, vi, 445, 471–472
  - with Sioux, iv, 464
  - with Six Nations, vi, 323
  - with Winnebagoes, iv, 235, 464
- Tree burial, in canoes, v, 655
  - *See also* Scaffold burial, v, 655.
- Trees, belief concerning, ii, 224
  - signal, of Klamath Indians, iii, 150–151
  - *See also* Sugar making; Sugar-pines.
- Trent, William, land granted to, vi, 596
- Tribal organization, history, and government, i, 191–312; ii, 123–199
- Tribal relations. *See* Alliances; Confederacy; Leagues.
- Tribal rights, attitude concerning, vi, 523
- Tribes, Indian, changes in location of, v, 121–122
  - Classification, i, 191, 196–198; ii, 33, 343; iii, 397–407
  - distribution, ii, 33–38; iii, 576
  - division and multiplication of, i, 268–269; iii, 247, 269
  - east of the Mississippi in 1836, iii, 610
  - emigrating from east to west of Mississippi, iii, 610
  - estimate of number, i, 191, 192; vi, 552

Tribes—Continued
  extinction, I, 191, 195; III, 96; IV, 115
  general similarity among, V, 87, 129
  geographical position of, V, 121–123
  having treaties with United States, III, 609
  indigenous, near western frontier (1836), III, 611
  influences affecting development of, VI, 672
  interrelations of, V, 141
  lack of unity among, IV, 482
  location and numbers of, at time of removal, VI, 409–411
  map, showing linguistic classification, II, 28
    showing location, III, 96, 200; IV, 24, 39, 180
  origin and names, III, 247
  permanence of location, III, 202
  rank and relationship among, I, 265, 268; II, 170; III, 266–267; V, 136
  sedentary, life of, I, 50–51
  tables showing classification, III, 401–402
  transferred, condition of, VI, 554
  west of the Mississippi in 1834, III, 609, 610
  western, grouping of, I, 192, 198
  without United States treaties, III, 609
  See also Indians.
Tribute, paid in gold, IV, 449
  paid to Mohawks, III, 185
  See also Taxes.
Trimble, Colonel, interest in the Indians, II, 522
Trinity Indians, estimated number of, III, 171
  population, III, 634
  See also Hoopah Indians; Trinity River Tribes.
Trinity River, description of, III, 137
  plans for reservation on, III, 151
  villages on, III, 139
Trinity River tribes, account of, III, 139–144
  See Klamath and Trinity tribes; Trinity Indians.
Trois River, tribes living near, VI, 714
Troost, Dr., II, 318
  reference to work of, I, 47
Troy Indians, location of, III, 583
  population, III, 583
Trueman, Major, death of, VI, 338
  force led by, VI, 145
Tsallake (Tsallakee), a name for the Cherokee (q. v.), II, 35; VI, 33
Tsamak, an upper California language, III, 402
Tsattine. *See* Beaver Indians.
Tsawatenok. *See* Soi it inu.
Tse-ah, native name for Cia, IV, 35
Tshinook, a linguistic family, III, 402
Tshokantauha, a Mendewakanton village, II, 97
Tshuktchi, classification of language of, III, 401
Tsihailish, classification of, III, 402
  See also Chehalis.
Tsillawadoot (Tsillaw-awdoot), an Athapascan tribe, III, 542
  population, II, 28
Tsimshian. *See* Skeena.
Tsonontowans, meaning of name, VI, 326
  nickname for the Senecas (q. v.), VI, 326
Tsou Chaoong, measurements of hair of, III, 376, 383
Tuanoh (Tu-a-nooch, Tucanoh), VI, 687
  brief account of, V, 701
  location, IV, 598; VI, 689
  population, I, 521; IV, 598; VI, 689
  See also Twana.
Tu-a-nooch. *See* Tuanoh.
Tuberculosis. *See* Consumption.
Tubes, stone, accuracy shown in, IV, 160
  description of, I, 93
  illustrations of, I, 93; IV, 160
Tucanoh. *See* Tuanoh.
Tuck a batcha (Tuck a batch cha Town), a Creek town, IV, 575, 578
  chiefs of, IV, 575
  See also Tuckabatchees.
Tuck a batcha micco of Tuck a batch cha Town, IV, 575
Tuck a batch ee fix i co, a chief at Osloitchee, IV, 580
Tuck a batch ee har jo, a Cussetaw Town chief, IV, 579
Tuckabatchee Teehassa, a Creek town, V, 262

Tuckabatchees (Tuckabatches' town), v, 254
  a Creek town, v, 262
  brass pieces preserved in, v, 283
  See also Tuckabatcha.
Tuckabatches tribe, attitude of, in Creek war, vi, 369
Tuckabatchi. *See* Tuck a batcha.
Tucullies, language of, v, 172
  See also Tacullies.
Tuecuntallahassee, derivation of name, iv, 380
Tug-waug-aun-ay, a chief at La Pointe, ii, 145
Tuh-duh-guh-mak-ke, measurements of hair of, iii, 384
Tukkabachee Mikko, Muscogee chief, v, 660
Tukkuthkutchin. *See* Deagothee Loochoo.
Tula (Ark.), a point on De Soto's march, iii, 48, 50
  De Soto's stop at, vi, 67
  probable location of, iv, 315
Tula (Mex.), capital of the Toltecs, v, 96
  founding of, v, 95; vi, 742
Tula or Tulara (Calif.), location of, iii, 201
  population, iii, 201
Tulare Lake, vocabulary from, iv, 413–414
Tulareños. *See* Tula or Tulara; Tulares.
Tulares, territory occupied by, iii, 421
Tullushatches town. *See* Tal la se hatch ee.
Tu-lo-mos, a Dolores Mission tribe, ii, 506
Tulpehocken, settlement of lands of, iv, 324
Tum Waters, population of, iii, 632
Tu-ma-leh-nias, description of, iii, 102-103
Tumuli, not a part of fortifications, v, 104
  Peruvian, explanation of, v, 90, 92
  proper, i, 49–51
  western, epoch of discovery of, iv, 131–136
  wide range of, v, 104
  See also Guacas; Mounds.
Tunice, mention of pueblo of, iv, 211
Tun nee chee, chief at Hitch e tee, iv, 580
Tuolumne language, vocabulary of, iv, 408–412
Tuolumne tribes, divisions of, iv, 407
Tuota migga chopco, of Hemawhie Town, iv, 576
Turgot, M., work of, on languages, ii, 355-356
Turk, The. *See* "The Turk."
Turner, Capt., death of, vi, 169
  expedition led by, vi, 169
Turner's Falls, King Philip at, vi, 168
  naming of, vi, 169
Turnip, Dacotah, Indian name for, iv, 68
Turn Water Indians, location of, iv, 598
  population, iv, 598
Turtle oracle, description of, iii, 367
Tusayan, Cardenas received at, iv, 25
  expedition to, iv, 38
  identified as Moqui, iv, 39
  map showing location of, iv, 39
  reached by Coronado, iv, 24–25
Tuscaloosa, Chief, iii, 57; vi, 61, 647
  De Soto attacked by, iii, 42
  death of, iii, 44; vi, 743
  made a captive by De Soto, iii, 42
  name, meaning of, ii, 34
  self-sacrifice of, v, 46
  war led by, v, 45
Tuscaloosa River, etymology of the name, ii, 34; v, 593
  fort erected at, vi, 301, 302
Tuscarora (Tuskeruro) language, iii, 292
  compared with Woccoa, iii, 406
  vocabulary, v, 552–556
Tuscarora Reservation, census of, vi, 690
  location, vi, 690
Tuscarora (town), Onondagas at, vi, 706
Tuscaroras (Toscororas, Tuskaroras), iii, 555
  admitted to Iroquois Confederacy, iii, 198
  affinity with Iroquois, i, 197
  and Oneidas (Oneydoes), land ceded by, vi, 324
    warriors of, iii, 561
  census, i, 441–457; iii, 621–628; v, 504–505; vi, 718
  classification, iii, 401

Tuscaroras—Continued
  colonies aided by, vi, 334
  condition, general, iv, 606
  connections, v, 37
  country occupied by, i, 441; iii, 196, 583, 590; iv, 606; v, 42, 668, 669; vi, 33, 182, 689, 705, 714
  defeat by colonists, v, 110
  emigration to New York, v, 631
  entry into Mississippi Valley region, v, 41
  fort built by, i, 47
  government, v, 504
  hostility of, vi, 193
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
  included in Monacan dialects, iii, 292
  independence in warfare, vi, 199
  in the Revolutionary War, v, 513; vi, 277
  Iroquois joined by, iii, 292; vi, 185–186, 194
  linguistic classification, vi, 185
  massacre planned by, i, 126; vi, 185
  missionary labors among, v, 698
  number on reservation, ii, 541
  of Iroquois stock, v, 42
  one of the Six Nations, iv, 616
  population, iii, 583, 590; iv, 603, 604, 606; v, 668; vi, 689, 694, 705, 706, 707, 714
  property possessed by, v, 506
  report on missions among, v, 700
  represented at Canandaigua council, vi, 326
  reservation described, ii, 540–541
  stand in Revolutionary War, v, 513; vi, 277, 283, 284, 293, 312
  synonym of Monacans, v, 35
  uprising, vi, 182
  warriors, number of, iii, 555; vi, 270
Tus coner hargo, a Creek chief, iv, 576
Tushewa. *See* De-o-se-o-wa.
Tushshepahs (Tushepah, Tushepaw), location of, iii, 572
  population, iii, 572, 609; v, 706
Tuskaroras. *See* Tuscaroras.
Tus kee ga, an Upper Creek town, iv, 578
Tuskeegees, a Creek town, v, 262
Tuskehenehawshooley, a Cussetaw Town chief, iv, 579
Tuskeruro language. *See* Tuscarora language.
Tuski Hadjo's Band, numbers of, iii, 531
Tusonimon visited by expedition, iii, 303
Tus sick i holatta of Tuck a batch cha Town, iv, 575
Tustahatchee, surrender of, vi, 374
Tustannuggee Thlucco, treaty subscribed by, vi, 402
Tus ta nugga chopco of Tallissee Town, iv, 575
Tus tun nuck har jo, chief at Eufaula, iv, 580
Tus tunnugga of Tuck a batch cha Town, iv, 575
Tusuque. *See* Tesuque.
Tutahaco, iv, 32
  identification of, iv, 39
  map showing location, iv, 39
  visited by Coronado, iv, 34
Tutelar spirits, pictographs of, illustrated, i, 352
Tutelos (Toteloes, Tuteloes), v, 137; vi, 132
  adopted by the Iroquois, iii, 199
  allotted lands with Cayugas, iii, 292
  and others, population of, vi, 270
  classified as Monacans, v, 36
  country occupied by, iii, 196
  included in Monacan dialects, iii, 292
  received into Iroquois Confederacy, iii, 292; v, 37
Tutoten, a combination of Oregon tribes, vi, 702
  See also Tototans.
Tuttle, Mrs., recollections of, v, 673
Tututni. *See* Rogues; Totones; Totonic bands; Tototans.
Tuwanah, a California chief, vi, 711
Twana. *See* Toanda; To-an-hooch; Tuanoh; Twanoh.
Twanoh, Wood's canal, population of, vi, 701
Tweetwees (Twe Twee). *See* Twightwees.
Twightees. *See* Twightwees.
Twightwees (Tweetwees, Twe Twee, Twightees), a name for the Miamis, iv, 605; v, 41; vi, 271, 334
  dwelling place, vi, 714

Twightwees—Continued
  hunting grounds, vi, 714
  population, vi, 714
Twine making, implements for, i, 89
    illustrated, i, 89
  materials used for, i, 89
  Shoshonee method of, i, 213–214
Twins, uncommon among Indians, iii, 211
Twiss, Thomas S., report on Indian population, vi, 713
  statistics furnished by, vi, 713
Tyendanegea. *See* Thayendenegea.
Tyler, Asher, an authority on Indians, iv, 345
  investigation by, iv, 345–346
Ty-o-ga. *See* Tioga village.
Typoxe, a Tuolumne chief, iv, 407
Typoxies, a Tuolumne band, iv, 407

U

Ubak-héa, language of, iii, 112
Uchean family. *See* Uchees; Utchees.
Uchees (Uches), brief account of, iii, 26–27
  conquered by Creeks, iii, 40; vi, 186
  foes of Creeks, v, 98
  language distinct from Muscogee, ii, 32
  population, i, 522
  ruled by sachemess, iii, 40–41
  unclassified, ii, 33
  wars of, iii, 26–27
  See also Utchees, Yuchi.
Ucle nu, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census of, v, 488
Ufafa, big, a Creek town, v, 262
Ufala, little, a Creek town, v, 262
Ufalas, ceremony at, v, 255
Ufalas, Upper, a Creek town, v, 262
U faw la (Ufauley) Town, vi, 371
  Chiefs of, iv, 576
  Creek town, iv, 576, 578
  See also Eufaula.
Ugaljachmutzi (Ugalakmius), listed as a linguistic family, iii, 402
Uinta (Uinta Utahs). *See* Ewinte, Uwinty-Utahs.
Ulcers, treatment for, iv, 514
Ulloa, Peruvian antiquities described by, v, 90–92
Ulseahs, location of, iii, 571
  population, iii, 571
Ulster, reference to butchery at, vi, 298
Umahs, Cibolos absorbed by, i, 519
  population, i, 519
  See also Yumas.
Umanos, early Spanish name for Umahs (q. v.), i, 519
Umatilla. *See* Utillas.
Umpquas (Umquas), classification of, iii, 401
  clothing, iii, 219
  location, iii, 201; v, 492; vi, 624
    maps showing, iii, 96, 200
  population, i, 521; iii, 201, 632; v, 492; vi, 689, 701
  report on condition of, vi, 624–625
  See also Unikwa.
Umquas. *See* Umpquas.
Una, the brig, wreck of, iv, 601, 602
Unadilla, mention of Indian attack on, vi, 298
Unare, mission of Barcelona Province, iv, 556
Uncas, iii, 22; iv, 613; v, 121; vi, 114. 173, 248, 647
  alliance with the English, vi, 111
  captive Pequots assigned to, vi, 123
  dispute with Sassacus, vi, 116–117
  mention of policy of, vi, 153
  Miontonimo captured by, vi, 126
  Mohican sachem, v, 130; vi, 111
  tribal position of, iv, 481
  war against, by Narragansetts, vi, 125–127
Underhill, part taken by, in Pequot War, vi, 117, 118, 119
Unikwa, location of, i, 437
  See also Umpquas.
Union, Calif., town of, described, iii, 132
United (Moravian) Brethren, missionary labors of, vi, 736
  See also Church of the United Brethren; Moravian Church.
United States, population and area of, iv, 610
United States Exploring Expedition, iii, 200

United States Government, policy respecting Indians, I, 223, 240–241, 245–246, 263–264, 280–282, 287; V, 449–473
  policy recommended to, I, 225–226, 255–256
Unity of Indian tribes, IV, 353; V, 89, 289–291; VI, 573
Up-le-goh, a Trinity River village, III, 139
Upper Creeks. *See* Creeks, Upper.
Upper Missouri agency, condition of tribes of, IV, 465
Upper Missouri River tribes, VI, 695
  census, 695–696
Upper Oualla Towns, census of, I, 508–517
Upper Platte Agency, census of, VI, 713
Upper Pond Orrilles. *See* Pend d'-Oreilles, Upper.
Upsaroka language, brief vocabulary of, III, 255–256
  conclusions drawn from, III, 252
Upsarokas, IV, 551
  Blackfeet named by, V, 180
  classification, III, 402
  country occupied by, III, 514; IV, 486; V, 197, 494
  identified as Minnetarees, III, 403
  migration, V, 197
  population, V, 494
  ravaged by smallpox, I, 257
  See also Absarokas; Crow Indians; Mandan and Upsaroka family.
Upsi, Eric, mission undertaken by, VI, 742
Urn burials, evidence of, in South Carolina, VI, 182
  example and discussion of, IV, 162–163
Utah Territory, data on land of, V, 501
  Indian lands in, IV, 183
  Indian population, I, 522, 523; V, 484–485, 489; VI, 705
  population and area, IV, 610
  tribes of, I, 522
Utahs, bands of, among the "Diggers," V, 199–200
  classification, IV, 551; VI, 689
  country occupied by, V, 199–201
  depredations, IV, 216
Utahs—Continued
  divisions, VI, 697
  general description, V, 197–202
  hostility to Whites, IV, 597
  language, VI, 698
  linguistic classification, VI, 34
  location, I, 198; IV, 216; VI, 689, 698, 705
    map showing, III, 96
  migration, V, 197
  peace made by, with Shoshones, IV, 596
  southern population of, I, 519
  See also Ute.
Utawawas, a name for the Ottawas, VI, 202
  location, VI, 202
  See also Ottawas.
Utchees (Utches), IV, 614
  absorbed by Creeks, VI, 370
  ancestors of, V, 99
  Appalachian by conquest, V, 42
  called Chicora, V, 42
  classification, II, 345, III, 401
  conquered by Creeks, V, 115; VI, 365
  country occupied by, V, 42
  cranial capacity, V, 244
  generic stock, VI, 31
  incorporated with Creeks, VI, 32, 689
  linguistic family, III, 401, 404
  location, VI, 32, 689
  population, VI, 689
  use of term, VI, 47
  See also Uchees; Yuchi.
Ute. *See* Eutahs; Eutaws; Utahs; Yutas.
Utensils, Apache, for grinding, V, 209
  wooden, of the Creeks, V, 692
    of the Iowas, III, 275
  See also Baskets; Implements; Mortars; Pestles; Pottery.
Utfonango, tribes dwelling at, VI, 714
Utillas, population of, V, 493
  position, V, 493
Utinas, absorbed by Creeks, VI, 370
  era of, V, 133
  foes of the Creeks, V, 98
Utsehta. *See* Little Osage.
Uupon tea, black drink made of, V, 266
Uwinty, Chief, band named for, V, 200

Uwinty-Utahs (Unita Utahs), IV, 596
  band of the Utahs, V, 199
  origin of name, V, 199–200
  population, V, 498
Uxmal, feature of ruins of, V, 106

V

Vaccination of Indians, VI, 452
Vaché, Alex. F., petition signed by, III 618
Vail, Eugene, I, 122
Vallejo, Gen. M. J., V, 665
Valley of Mexico, migrations into, V, 95–96
Vampyres, beliefs concerning, III, 226
Van Amringe, William F., measurements of hair of, III, 383
Van Buren, Martin, Cherokee removal aided by, VI, 493
  Indian affairs under, VI, 482–506
Vancouvers, population of, III, 632
Vancouver's Island, reference to earthworks on, V, 665
Van Den Broek, Rev. T. J., pamphlet transmitted by, IV, 539
Van Helmont, IV, 511
Van Horn, Maj., defeat of, VI, 359, 362
Van Renselaer, Capt., wounded in action, VI, 341
Van Schaick, Col., expedition of, against Onondagas, VI, 306
Vapor-bath (Steam-bath, Sweat-bath), as a purification rite, V, 423-424
  description, II, 182; IV, 516
  use of, by Massachusetts Indians, I, 285
    by Muscogee, I, 274
    general, IV, 511–512
    restricted V, 424
  See also Madodiswon; Sweat-house; Vapor-bath lodge.
Vapor-bath lodge, construction of, V, 424, 426
  description of, V, 424
  See also Sweat house.
Varieties, use of the term in natural history, IV, 354
Vashon's Island, Indians of, V, 491; VI, 703
Vasquez d'Ayllon, Lucas, date of defeat of, III, 27
  defeat of, illustrated, III, 27
  expedition of, III, 25–26; VI, 39
  Indians kidnapped by, II, 35–36
Vater, Prof., II, 356
Vaughn, Alfred J., population report by, VI, 693
Vaux, Richard, III, 376
Vavasour, Lt., population estimate by, V, 707
Venango, Fort, reference to taking of, IV, 614
Venango, inscriptions near, V, 76; VI, 605
  Washington's journey to, VI, 214
Venango stone, V, 85
Veneration for the aged, and for the dead, II, 196
Venesection, method of performing, IV, 512, 515
Vengeance, among the Creeks, I, 277
  See also Retaliation.
Ventriloquism, practice similar to, V, 440
Vera Cruz, State of, antiquities in, VI, 581
Verde region, abandonment of, III, 303
Vermilion River, tribe near, VI, 556
Vermilions, III, 561
  fighting men of, III, 561
Vermont, population and area of, IV, 610
Vernon, Maj., Fort Laurens abandoned by, VI, 305
Verrazanim, John de, at New York harbor, VI, 743
  expedition of, VI, 40–43, 48
Versailles Treaty, effect of, VI, 249
Vesperia, use of term, V, 104
Vesperic tribes, application of the name, II, 25–26; V, 99, 287, 406; VI, 35
  characteristic traits, V, 130
  pictography of, VI, 605
  route of migration, V, 99
  territory occupied by, II, 28
Vespucio, Americo (Vespucius, Americus), discovery by, IV, 562
  voyages of, II, 19
Vessels, cooking, illustrated, I, 85
  See also Pottery.
Vicuris, language of, V, 689
  See also Picuris.

Vieux Desert Island, fortifications on, II, 91
  map of, II, 91
Village of the Cross (Ottawa), census of, I, 478–487
Villages, cause of multiplication of, II, 172
  fortified, I, 51
  list of, on Klamath River, III, 138
    on Trinity River, III, 139
  Massachusetts Indian, I, 287
  naming of, II, 171
  of the Creeks, V, 262
  sites selected for, III, 271
  St. Mary's and Michilimackinac Agency, III, 601–606
Vincennes, Ind., fight for possession of, VI, 303
  founding of, VI, 197
  French post established at, VI, 183, 185
  settlement of, V, 108
  trade at, VI, 269
  transfer of agency at, VI, 397
Vinland, area called, VI, 608
  attempt to colonize, I, 106
  discovery and naming of, VI, 742
"Viper," sloop-of-war, mission of, V, 677
Virginia, colonization of, VI, 95–99, 744
  discovery, VI, 82–84, 744
  Indian lands in, III, 583, 586; V, 480
  Indian population, III, 583, 586; V, 480
  Iroquois name for, III, 533
  landing in, illustrated, II, 22
  landing of English in, II, 22
  lost colony of, VI, 94
  mounds in, VI, 609
  population and area, IV, 610
  reported Celtic element in, VI, 742
  tribes inhabiting, VI, 32, 33, 83
  warfare on frontier of, IV, 625–626
  western, Indian depredations in, VI, 302
Virginia tribes, described by Jefferson, V, 36–37
  discussion of population, V, 35–36
Virgins, Indian, distinguished by hair dressing, IV, 89
  impersonation by men, IV, 85
  part taken at dance, IV, 85
Vishnoo, reference to worship of, V, 58
Visiting, etiquette of, V, 183
Vitachucco (Vitochucco), III, 57; V, 410
  reference to Micco of, VI, 63
  speech of, to his brothers, III, 39
Vnawunquosett, petition signed by, V, 237
Vocabulary, Algonquin, of compound words, IV, 373–380
  Algonquin group, II, 458–481
  Apache (Apachee), V, 202, 578–589
  Arapahoe, III, 446–459
  Assiniboine, IV, 416–432
  Batem-da-kai-ee (-Kato), III, 434–440
  Blackfeet, II, 494–505
  Caddo, V, 709–712
  Catawba, V, 557–558
  Cayuga, II, 482–493
  Cherokee, of numerals, II, 209–211
  Cheyenne, III, 446–459
  Chinook jargon, V, 548–551
  Chippewa (of Michigan), V, 556–557
  Chippewa numerals, II, 216–218
  Choctaw (brief), III, 347
  Choctaw, of numerals, II, 204–206
  Chow-e-shak, III, 434–440
  Co-co-noon, IV, 413
  collecting of, IV, 524–525
    by George Gibbs, V, 662, 663, 664, 665
  Comanche (Comanchee), II, 129–130, 494–505
    conclusions derived from, III, 403
  Cop-éh, III, 428–434
  Costanos, II, 494–505
    notes to, II, 506
  Cushna, II, 494–505
    notes to, II, 506–508
  Dacota, of numerals, II, 206–208
  Delaware, II, 470–481; III, 424–427
  Diegunos, II, 103–104
  Eh-nek, III, 440–445
  Hitchittee dialect, or numerals, II, 220
  Hoo-pah, III, 440–445
  Iroquois group, II, 482–493
  King's River, IV, 413–414
  Klatsop (brief), III, 223–224
  Kula-napo, III, 428–434

Vocabulary—Continued
  Mandan, III, 255–256; 446–459
  Massachusetts language, I, 288–299
  Menomonee, II, 470–481
  Miami, II, 470–481
  Micmac, V, 578–589
  Minnetaree (brief), III, 256
  Mohawk, II, 482–493
  Muskogee or Creek, IV, 416–429
    phonetic key to, IV, 432
  Natic, V, 556–557
  Navajo, IV, 416–429
  number of, published, V, 55
  of Indian languages, list of, IV, 552–553
  Ojibwa, II, 211–213, 458–469
  Oneida, II, 482–493
  Onondaga, II, 482–493
  Osage, IV, 275
  Pamptico, V, 556–557
  Pampticough, V, 555–556
  Pimo, III, 461–462
  Pueblo (of Tusuque), III, 446–459
  Pueblo (Zuñi), IV, 416–429
  Sacramento River Indians, IV, 414–415
  Shawnee, II, 470–481
  Shoshonee, brief, I, 216, 218
  Tah-le-wah, III, 440–445
  Tcho-ko-yem, III, 428–434
  Tulare Lake, IV, 413–414
  Tuolumne Indians, IV, 408–412
  Tuskeruro, V, 552–556
  Upsaroka (brief), III, 255–256
  Waccoa, V, 552–556, 557–558
  Wee-yot, III, 434–440
  Weits-pek, III, 440–445
  Winnebago, of numerals, II, 214–216
  Wish-osk, III, 434–440
  Witchita (Wichita) V, 709–711
  Wyandot, of numerals, II, 218–220
  Yukai, III, 428–434
  Yuman, II, 118–121
  See also Dictionary; Lexicon; Algonquin.
Vocabularies and grammars, importance of collecting, IV, 656–657
Volney, C. F., V, 53
  cited, I, 184; II, 357
Von Gerolt, Baron, acknowledgment to, II, 330

W

Waban, a mythological character, V, 409
Wabanakees (Wabanakis, Wabenaki), alliance of, the Menomonie, I, 304
  inscriptions attributed to, I, 114
  name, application of, III, 353
    derivation of, III, 353
  See also Abnaki.
Wabash Indians, campaign against, VI, 335, 360
  derivation of name, IV, 379
  Fort Harrison invested by, VI, 359
Wabash River, tribes on, VI, 33, 275, 714
Wabashaw (Wah-be-shaw, Wabisha), chief of the Dacotas, II, 182
  speech to the British, IV, 258–259; VI, 193
Wabashaw's Band, a Medawakanton band, III, 613
  census, I, 498–507
Wabedatunka, or Black Dog, a Sioux chief, I, 352
Wabenaki. *See* Wabanakees.
Wabeno(s), classification of, II, 224
  derivation and meaning of the term, I, 359, 367
  evil spirit of the Algonquins, VI, 630
  explanation of, I, 366
  explanation of symbols of, I, 368–373
  exponents of religion, V, 405
  purpose of songs and ceremonies of, I, 368
  society of, II, 56; V, 71
Wabeno songs, pictographs of, VI, 397
  synopsis of, I, 380–381
Wabeseepenukaning, Band of, a Chippewa band, I, 458
  census, I, 458–467
Wabigganus, listed by Captain John Smith, V, 218
Wabojeeg. *See* Waub Ojeeg.
Wabose, Catherine, a Chippewa prophetess, I, 390
  account of life of, I, 394–396
  story of vision of, I, 391–394
Wabunakies, a Mississippi Valley Algonquin tribe, V, 41
Wabushaw, Seven Fires named by, II, 169
Wabushaw band, listed as one of Seven Fires, II, 169

Wacacoys (Waccocoie), a Creek town, v, 262
  derivation of name, iv, 380
Waccoa language. *See* Woccoa language.
Waccocoie. *See* Wacacoys.
Waccogo, mentioned by Capt. John Smith, v, 218
Wa-cha-mon-ya, Iowa orator, speech by, iii, 266
Wachor Sourette Antazo, at Utah peace council, iv, 596
Wachos, classification of, iii, 402
  See also Wacos.
Wachucknas, location of, vi, 710
  population, vi, 710
Wachusetts, derivation of the name, v, 222
  members of Pennacook Confederacy, v, 222
Wacksoyochees, a Creek town, v, 262
Wacoes. *See* Wacos.
Wacondah (Wahconda), the benevolent spirit, iv, 637
  Dacota name for supreme god, v, 72
Wacos (Wacoes, Waecoes), iii, 403; vi, 687
  dwellings of, v, 682
  intermarriage with Comanches, ii, 126
  language, v, 682, 712
  location, v, 712; vi, 689, 705
  population, i, 518; iii, 635; v, 702, 712; vi, 689, 699, 705, 708
  See also Wachos; Whacoes.
Wadaisaisemid. *See* Aisemid.
Wade, Elijah, interpreter, iv, 596
Wadsworth, Capt., defeat by Indians, vi, 165
Wady Mohattah, discussion of engraved rocks of, i, 423
Waecoes. *See* Wacos.
Waganukizzi. *See* Arbre Croche.
Wahclellah, a Shahalah tribe, iii, 570
  location, iii, 570
  See also Cascades, Watlala.
Wahconda. *See* Wacondah.
Wahhowpum. *See* Wahowpum.
Wahkiacums, location of, iii, 571
  population, iii, 571, 609
Wahkpacoota (Wahpaakoota), a division of the Sioux nation, ii, 168, 169; iii, 612
  identical with Wahkpatons, vi, 689
Wahkpatons (Wahk-patons), vi, 689
  division of the Sioux nation, ii, 165, 168
  origin of name, ii, 171
  See also Wahpeton.
Wah-na-tah, Dacotah chief, story of, iv, 95–96
Wahongnonawit, chief of the Swamscut, v, 228
Wahowpum, location of, iii, 570
  population, iii, 570, 609; v, 706
Wahpakootah and Medawakantoan, payments made to, vi, 721
  See also Wahpekute.
Wahpaytoan and Seseetoan band, payments made to, vi, 721
  See also Wahpeton.
Wahpeeton, a division of the Sioux or Dacota, iii, 612
  See also Wahpeton.
Wahpekute. *See* People of the Leaves, detached; Wahkpacoota; Wahpakootah; Warpekute.
Wahpeton. *See* People of the Leaves; Wahkpatons; Wahpaytoan; Wahpeeton; Warpetonwan.
Wah-sher, a Klamath River tribe, iii, 634
Wah-sherr, a village on Klamath River, iii, 138
Wah-sho-kig, at Shoshone peace council, iv, 596
Wah-zhusk-ons, meaning of name, iii, 360
Wah-zu-cootas, a Yankton band, ii, 169
  territory occupied by, ii, 169
Wailatpu, a linguistic family, iii, 402
Waishkee's Bay, census of Indians of, i, 458–467
Waitlas. *See* Oi Cle la.
Wakamucks, population unknown, i, 521
Wakan, discussion of term, iv, 642; vi, 648
Wakanascecies, population of, i, 521
Wakanasisi. *See* Wakanascecies.
Wakan-men. *See* Medicine-men.
Wakash, a linguistic family, iii, 402
Wakhshek. *See* Wah-sherr.

Wakinyan, Dakotah gods, iv, 644; vi, 650–651
Wakokayi. *See* Wacacoys.
Wakonda. *See* Wacondah.
Walam Olum. *See* Ola Walum.
Walapai. *See* Hah-wal-coes.
Waldron, Maj., fur trader at Pennacook, v, 235
  land granted to, v, 235
Walker, Adam, citation from narrative of, vi, 355
Walker, Hon. R. J., iv, 657
Walker, Senator, of Wisconsin, Indian legislation discussed by, v, 463–464, 470
Walker, Utah chief, ingenious horse stealing of, v, 200
Walker, William, vocabulary of, ii, 218
  story concerning, v, 692
Walker's River, peculiarity of, v, 202
Wakhtek. *See* Wauh-tecq.
Walking-Cloud, stoicism of, iii, 245
Wall, Maj. Thomas, iv, 583
Walla-wallas (Wallahwollah, Walla-Wallahs, Wallawollah, Wollahwollah,), census of, v, 493
  classification, iii, 402
  hunting grounds, i, 221
  maps showing location, iii, 96, 200
  marriage customs, v, 654
  medicine men, v, 652
  nature of country of, v, 656
  population of, i, 521; iii, 570, 609, 632; v, 490, 705, 706, 707; vi, 700, 701
Walla-walloo, a name for the We-yot, iii, 133
  See also Wishosk.
Walpi. *See* Opquive.
Wambec, derivation of the name, vi, 174
Wamesits, derivation of name, v, 221
  location, v, 221
  merged with Pennacooks, v, 222
  See also Pawtucket.
Wampanoags, a name for Pokanokets, vi, 114, 125
  affiliations, vi, 150
  apparent meaning of name, vi, 114
  country inhabited by, vi, 103
  migration tradition, v, 98
  missionary work among, vi, 734, 736
  See also Pokanokets.
Wampum, as described by Cotton Mather, i, 284
  ceremonial use of, iv, 339
  description, iii, 185
  illustration of, iii, 69
  sacred nature of, i, 86
  use and value, i, 84–85
    among Creeks, i, 268, 273, 277
    among the Sioux, ii, 177
    as a pledge, iv, 272
    as currency, iv, 241
Wampum-belts, used as credentials, ii, 243, 248
Wanita, Yankton chief, costume of, described, iii, 67
Wannalancet, petition signed by, v, 237
  son of Passaconnaway, v, 231
Wantats, a synonym of Wyandots, iv, 605
  warriors, iv, 605
  See also Hurons; Wyandots.
Wapacomegat (Wappacomigat), vi, 647
  a Mississagie leader, vi, 336
  Mississagies represented by, vi, 255
Wapasha. *See* Wabashaw.
Wapokenotta, Shawnee political capital, iv, 260
Wapoos, absorbed by Creeks, vi, 370
  era of, v, 133
  foes of Creeks, v, 98
Wappacomigat. *See* Wapacomegat.
Wappatomica, mention of town of, vi, 265
Wappatoo Indians, population of, iii, 570–571, 609
  tribes composing, iii, 570–571
Wappengers, location of, vi, 147
Wappockanita, intrusive antiquities explained by, v, 116
War(s), causes of, i, 191; ii, 190; iv, 52, 62
  Colonial, Indian part in, vi, 192–193
  costumes for, i, 235; iii, 67, 216; iv, 53–54, 63
  frontier Indian, account of, v, 138–139
  importance to Indian mind, ii, 56–57
  incidents of, ii, 56–62
  Indian advantages in, iii, 36
  Indian attitude toward, ii, 548; iii, 64; v, 214
  Indian, estimated cost of, v, 500

War(s)—Continued
  Indian, of 1813, events of, VI, 361–364
  intertribal, effect of, VI, 420–421
  methods used in, III, 215–216; IV, 52–53, 62, 202; VI, 454
  on Indians of Ohio Valley, IV, 622–627
  symbols used in commemorating, I, 401–402
  training of boys for, II, 56–57
  See also Black Hawk War; King Philip's War; Seminole War; Pontiac; and under tribal names.
War-chief, drawing showing operations of, IV, 495
  duties, IV, 52, 62
  power, II, 184; IV, 495
War clubs, Algonquin, described, I, 78
  buried with warrior, IV, 54
  illustrations of, II, 514
  making, described, I, 115
  See also Balista; Mace; Tomahawk.
War customs, Algonquin, VI, 661
  Comanche, II, 132; 684
  Creek, V, 280
  Dacotah, IV, 62–63
  Kenisteno, V, 168
  Winnebago, IV, 51–54
  See also War; War dance; War party.
War dance, II, 59–60
  Iroquois, described, III, 187
  Winnebago, described, III, 285
War exploits, ceremonial recital of, III, 64
  recorded by pictographs, I, 401, 406
War honors, counting of, II, 178–179
War of 1812, part taken in by Indians, III, 279; IV, 259; VI, 356–360
War-paint, customs concerning, IV, 649
War parties, appearance of, II, 113–114
  assembly and march of, III, 215; IV, 52, 62
  enlistment, II, 59
  equipment, V, 280
  return, III, 188; IV, 78
  start, III, 187–188
  See also War; Warriors.
War path of the Chippewa, I, 304
War-physic, use of, V, 268
War prophet, activities of, IV, 648
  function and power of, VI, 654–655
War shirts and coats, described, III, 67
  illustrated, III, 67
War songs, character of, II, 60
  examples of, II, 59; 61–62
  of Waub Ojeeg, V, 526–527
War-whoop, explanation of, IV, 53
Waranakarana, mention of tribe of, IV, 200
Waranawankongs, a division of the Mohikinder, III, 75
  country inhabited by, III, 75
  dialect of, III, 75
Ward, William, V, 287
Ware, Lieutenant, IV, 630
Warigwick, listed by Capt. John Smith, V, 218
Warpekute, a subdivision of the Isanyati, I, 248
  See also Wahpekute.
Warpetonwan, a subdivision of the Isanyati, I, 248
Warrahiagey, VI, 280
Warre, Lt., Indian population estimated by, V, 707
Warren, Dr., V, 287
Warren, Sir Peter, VI, 210
Warren, William W., paper by, on the Ojibway, II, 135
  qualifications, II, 135
  vocabulary, II, 211
Warriors, Chippewa, custom of, V, 71
  continence, VI, 661
  costumes, I, 235; III, 216; IV, 53–54, 63
  dependence on war-prophet, IV, 648–649
  discussion of Indians as, III, 479–480
  facial painting, III, 216; IV, 53, 63
  noted Ojibwa, sketches of, II, 160–167
  numbers, estimate of, III, 559
    table showing, III, 553–561
  preparation for war, VI, 661
  use in Revolutionary War, III, 561
  See also under tribal names.
Warwick, R. I., attack on, by Indians, VI, 164

Wasbashas (Was-ba-shaw), allegorical origin of, vi, 206
  country occupied by, vi, 206
  Osage name for themselves, iv, 305, 592
  See also Osage; Washashe; Washbashas.
Wasco(s), location of, v, 493
  population, v, 493
  See also Wascopams; Waskows.
Wascopams (Wascopan, Wascopaws), census of, v, 493
  maps showing location of, iii, 96, 200
  population, i, 521; iii, 632; vi, 701
Wasechoe, trip made by, to England, vi, 84, 89
Washakie's band. *See* Washano.
Washano, bands of, among the "Diggers," v, 199
Washashe, a synonym for Osage (q. v.), iv, 550
Washbashas (Washbashaws), a name for the Osages, ii, 35; v, 495; vi, 688, 689
  population, vi, 689
Washburn, C. P., population table by, vi, 706
  report, on Iroquois population, iv, 603
Washington, Col., expedition led by, iv, 209
Washington, Col. John, vi, 145
  expedition led by, vi, 135–136
  great-grandfather of George Washington, vi, 136
Washington, George, iii, 294; v, 668; vi, 335
  aid asked of, by Indians, v, 667
  aid rendered to, by Sullivan, vi, 309
  early journeys, vi, 198
  entered into Indian warfare, vi, 208
  expeditions to Indian country, vi, 212–214
  impression made on Indians, vi, 213
  in French and Indian wars, vi, 226
  in Indian wars, vi, 216
  Indian name of, v, 667
  Indian policy of, vi, 277, 338, 342
  Iroquois name for, iii, 525
  measurements of hair of, iii, 383
  repulse of, vi, 249
Washington—Continued
  surrender at Fort Necessity, vi, 215
  treaties made by, vi, 365
  visit to Ohio Valley, vi, 596
Washington and Oregon Territories, land and population of, v, 501
Washington Territory, character of land in, v, 656
  Indian population of, v, 490–491, 703–707; vi, 689, 703, 705
  tribes and lands of, v, 703–704; vi, 700, 701–702, 703
Washita River, Indians on tributary of, v, 712
Waskows, burials of, v, 655
  customs, v, 652
    marriage, v, 654
  medicine men, v, 652
  See also Wasco(s).
Wass, Count, measurements of hair of, iii, 383
Wassaws, battle with Catawbas, iii, 294
  See also Waxsaws.
Wassong, speech of, at treaty with Bradstreet, vi, 255
Watche-namp, at Shoshone peace council, iv, 596
Watch-ha-ta-kaw, brief account of, iv, 233
Watch-ha-ta-kaw's band, census of, i, 498–507
Waterees, ii, 344
  language undermined, v, 42
  status among tribes, iv, 158
Waterpower in Shoshonean country, i, 209
Watlala, classification of, iii, 402
  See also Cascades; Wahclellah.
Watsaghika. *See* Watsa-hé-wa.
Watsa-hé-wa, a Scott's valley band, iii, 171, 422
  extent of language, iii, 422
Watson, Elkanah, information furnished by i, 139
Wattasoons (Mattasoons), iii, 514
  brief account of, iii, 251
  resemblance of, to Mandans, iii, 251
  See also Ahahawa.
Watts, Maj., at battle of Oriskany, vi, 288
Wauba, son of Sagima, vi, 202
Wau-be-nace, son of Sagima, vi, 202

- Waub Ojeeg (Wabojeeg, Waub-o-jeeg), III, 278; V, 184
  - biography, V, 524–527
  - death, II, 160; V, 527
  - grave-post, I, 356
  - hunting exploit, II, 54; V, 527
  - renowned Ojibwa war leader, II, 149
  - victory song, II, 60–61
  - war-chief of the Chippewa, V, 148
  - war exploits, II, 149–150
  - war parties led by, V, 525–526
  - war song, V, 526
- Waub-o-jeeg, the third, brief account of, II, 163
- Waubunsee, brief biography of, V, 530–531
- Wauh-tecq, a village on Klamath River, III, 138
- Waulatpus, population of, III, 632
  - *See also* Cayuse; Yeletpo.
- Waw-kon-chaw-koo-kah. *See* Wee-no-shik.
- Waw-kon-chaw-zu-kaw's band, census of, I, 498–507
- Waw-kon-haw-kaw, characterization of, IV, 233
- Waw-kon-haw-kaw's band, census of, I, 498–507
- Waw-maw-noo-kaw-kaw's band, census of, I, 498–507
- Waw-mo-moka, Iowa chief, characterization of, III, 265
- Waw-non-que-skoon-a, map drawn by, III, 256–257
  - map of Ioway country by, III, 256
- Waxhaw. *See* Wassaws; Waxsaws.
- Waxsaws, head flattening among, II, 324–325
  - manner of life, IV, 158
- Wayne, Gen., army of, attacked by Creeks, VI, 319, 332, 338
  - campaigns against western Indians, VI, 338–341
  - Indian fighting of, VI, 217
  - Indian name for, VI, 340
  - Indians defeated by, V, 528
- Wayondotts. *See* Wyandots.
- Wazikute. *See* Wah-zu-cootas.
- Wea. *See* Ouachtenons; Ougatanons; Ouitimaus; Weas.
- Wea language, an Algonquin dialect, II, 341
- Weapons, antique Mexican, VI, 580, 589
    - illustrated VI, 590
  - consecration of, IV, 648–649
  - Navajo, IV, 214
  - of California tribes, V, 217
  - of Columbia River tribes, III, 215
  - of the Dacotahs, IV, 63
  - of the Five Nations, III, 189
  - used in buffalo hunt, IV, 95, 96
  - variety of, IV, 54
  - *See also* Arrowheads; Arrows; Balista; Battle-axe; Bows and arrows; Lances; Mace; Shield; Spear; Tomahawk; War club.
- Weas (Weeas), VI, 329, 481
  - allies of Miamies, VI, 330
  - also called Illinese, V, 41
  - annuities, II, 587, 589
  - armistice granted to, VI, 364
  - census, I, 488–497; III, 621–628
  - classification, V, 145
  - condition of, general, IV, 467, 468
    - report on VI, 547
  - country occupied by, I, 488; III, 585, 592; IV, 461; VI, 705
  - defeat by Gen. Wayne, VI, 217
  - friendly to the French, VI, 237
  - funds required for, II, 575
  - hostility, VI, 334
  - identified as Miamies, VI, 689
  - in Pontiac's conspiracy, VI, 243
  - included in Algonquin group, II, 36
  - lands of, III, 565; IV, 572
    - ceded by, II, 603, 604
    - disposal of, V, 496
    - purchased from, II, 593, 595, 598, 599, 600
    - statistics on, II, 606
  - maps showing location of, III, 96; VI, 519
  - missionary work among, VI, 739, 740
  - peace sought by, VI, 343
  - population, I, 524; III, 585, 592, 609, 610; IV, 572; VI, 272, 693, 705
  - removal, VI, 516, 536
    - agreed to, VI, 445
    - plans for, III, 576, 577
  - reservation ceded by, VI, 397
  - treaty with, V, 496, 497, 499; VI, 380
  - warriors, number of, VI, 271
  - *See also* Ouachtenons; Ougatamous; Ouitimaus.

Weas and others, fiscal statistics relating to, vi, 721, 723
  location, vi, 705
  population, v, 708; vi, 705
Weas and Piankashaws, location of, vi, 275
  maps showing colony of, iv, 180
  population, vi, 275
Weatherford, Chas., map showing place of, v, 255
Weaving, aboriginal periods indicated by, iv, 138–139
  discussion of sample of, iv, 138
  in Peru and Mexico, v, 106
  Navajo, described, iv, 436–437
  Pueblo, illustrated, iv, 436; vi, 71
  use of shuttle in, i, 88
  See also Loom; Spinning.
Webb, Gen., vi, 221
Webb, Dr. Thomas H., subject referred to, iv, 121
Webster, Dr. N., theory of, concerning mounds, iv, 132; vi, 602
Wecquaesgeek. *See* Wequa-esgecks.
Weeas. *See* Weas.
Weeng, a mythological character, v, 409
Wee-noo-shik's band, census of, i, 498–507
Wee-no-shik (Wee-no-shaik), iii, 281
  account of, iv, 232–233
Weeokees, a Creek town, v, 262
Weetumpka, derivation of name, iv, 381
Wee-yot, description of, iii, 127–128
  name given Eel River Indians, iii, 127
  origin of name, iii, 422
  population, iii, 127
Wee-yot language, vocabulary of, iii, 434–440
We guf car. *See* We o guf ka.
Wehtl-qua, a Klamath River tribe, iii, 634
Weht'l-qua, a village on Klamath River, iii, 138
Weirs, The, former names of, v, 226
Weitle toch, a Milbank Sound tribe, v, 487
  census of, v, 487
Weits-pek (1), a Klamath River tribe, iii, 634
Weits-pek (2), a village on Klamath River, iii, 138
  burning of, iii, 138
Weits-pek language, characteristics of, iii, 422
  territory using, iii, 422
  vocabulary, iii, 440–445
Wellbanks, Capt., fraud perpetrated by, v, 276
Weller, Senator, of California, v, 468
  Indian legislation discussed by, v, 467–468
Wells, ancient evidence of, iv, 135
Welsh element, in Indian language, iv, 118
Welsh explorers, supposed descendants of, iv, 81
Welsh Indians, traditional origin of, i, 124; ii, 321; v, 59–60
We-non-ga, brief account of, ii, 165
Wenongay, an Ojibwa war leader, ii, 155
We o guf ka (We guf car Town), an Upper Creek town, iv, 576, 578
  chief of, iv, 576
Weopemcoka tribe, vi, 91
Wequa, English assisted by, vi, 118
Wequa-esgecks, location of, vi, 147
Weroance, title of ruler, vi, 87
Wesleyan Missionary Society, missions established by, vi, 739
Wessagusset. *See* Wichagashas.
Wessels, Maj., iii, 100, 105, 133, 135, 155, 157
Westchester Algonquins, territory occupied by, vi, 147
Western Evangelical Missionary Society, v, 188
  data on missions of, vi, 740
Western Foreign Missionary Society, missions established by, vi, 739
West India Co., vi, 143
West Indies, state of Indian art in, iv, 122
Westoes, subordinate tribe of the Catawbas, vi, 179
West River, Vt., illustrations of inscriptions at, vi, 606
Wethersford, surrender of, vi, 374
Wetlko. *See* Weht'l-qua.
Wetumpka (Wetumpkees), a Creek town, v, 262
  Muscogee seat of power, vi, 32
We wark ka, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census, v, 488

We wark kum, a Queen Charlotte Sound tribe, v, 488
  census, v, 488
We woak car (We woak kar, Wewocau), a Creek town, iv, 576, 578
  chief of, iv, 576
  derivation of name, iv, 380
Wewoka. *See* We woak car.
Weyapiersenwaw, treaty signed by, vi, 344
Weymouth, George, attack on, by Indians, vi, 164
  voyage of, vi, 96
Wezaokonaye, a noted Pillager, v, 189
Whacoes, i, 239
  brief description of, i, 240
  population, i, 240
  See also Wacos.
Whale's Head, Indians of, vi, 702
Whaling customs of the Ma-caw Indians, iv, 602
Wheelappas, population, iii, 632
Wheeling, origin of name, iv, 379, 490; v, 593; vi, 264
Wheelock, Eleazer, work of, vi, 734, 735, 736
Wheelock School, v, 518, 519; vi, 284
  report on, iv, 584
Wheelpo, location of, iii, 572
  population, iii, 572, 609; v, 706
  See also Colville.
Wheelwright, John, land conveyed to, v, 228
"Wheelwright Deed," v, 229
Whipple, Lt. A. W., diary of, ii, 100–118
  observations of, v, 214
  vocabularies collected by, iii, 405
Whips, illustrated, ii, 516
  Indian form of, ii, 514
Whiskey trade, effects of, ii, 188–189, 192; v, 190
  See also Alcoholic liquors.
Whistanatin, location of, vi, 702
  population, vi, 702
Whitaker, Rev. Mr., v, 519
Whitby's Island, Indian population of, v, 491
  tribes on, vi, 703
White, Brig. Gen. James, march of, against Creeks, vi, 367
White, C. P., petition signed by, iii, 618
White, Father, Chesapeake Indians described by, vi, 129
White, Gov. John; birth of granddaughter of, vi, 93
  colony established by, vi, 93
White, James, Indians influenced by, v, 675
White, Judge Hugh L., iv, 630
  charges of, against Mr. Curry, vi, 474–475
White, Lt., chief of Oakfuskies, v, 263
  description of, v, 255
  War Mico of Oakfuskies, v, 255
White, Mr., murder of party of, ii, 556
White Cloud, Chief, brief account of, iii, 264
White Dog Ceremony, v, 672
  See also Dogs.
White Dog sacrifice, brief account of, iv, 591
  See also Dogs.
White Eyes, Capt., i, 354
White Eyes, Chief, Indian name of, iii, 528
  influence used by, vi, 300
  treaty signed by, vi, 303
Whitefish, illustration of, v, 117
White ground, Creek, v, 271
Whitehair, Chief George, vi, 712
  death of, iv, 592–593
White Indians. *See* Blanco Barbus.
White Mountain Apaches; an Apache division, iv, 216
White Mountains, aboriginal name of, iii, 521
White River, bands on, vi, 703
  description of, iv, 312
  Indian name for, iv, 312
  journey to sources of, iv, 303–306
  tribe on, v, 199
White River country, description of, iv, 287–296
White River Valley, journey through, iv, 299–303
White Thunder, Chief, vi, 214
White towns, Creek, places of refuge, v, 279
Whites, Creek relations with, v, 278
  effect of contact with, ii, 139
  Indian attitude toward innovations of, ii, 189
  tradition concerning advent of, i, 18; ii, 144
Whiting, David V., vocabulary collected by, iii, 446

Whitman family, massacre of, v, 653
Whittaker, Mrs. Jane, captivity among Indians, v, 670–672
Whittlesey, Hon. E., IV, 438
Whittlesy, Charles, acknowledgment to, III, 558
  reference to work of, IV, 190
Wiam. *See* Wyampam.
Wiandots. *See* Wyandots.
Wi-atta-che-chah, origin of name, II, 171
Wichagashas, affiliation of, VI, 150
Wichita language. *See* Witchita language.
Wichitas (Witchetaws, Witchitas), brief description of, v, 683
  depredations committed by, v, 712
  language spoken by, v, 712
  location, III, 635; v, 712; VI, 705
  population, I, 518; III, 635; v, 702, 712; VI, 689, 705, 708
  result of attacks on, VI, 708
  treaty with, VI, 461
  See also Panis piques.
Wicocomoco. *See* Wicomocos; Wycomeses.
Wicomocos (Wighcomocos), location of, VI, 131
Widowers, remarriage of, III, 238
Widows, customs concerning, II, 133
  Hindoo, customs concerning, v, 59
  remarriage of, III, 238
  sacrifice of, by California tribes, v, 217
Wi-e-wa-ha, Iowa chief, description of, III, 264
Wife-lending, custom of, III, 190
Wighcomocos. *See* Wicomocos.
Wigwam, area characterized by, II. 26
  construction of, II, 80
  Dacota, described, II, 191
  Dacota, illustration of, II, 190
  family life in, II, 63
  illustrations of, II, 80, 190; III, 70
  Navaho, described, III, 70
    illustrated, III, 70
  of New England tribes, VI, 109
  See also Lodge.
Wihinasht, classification of, III, 402
Wild Mountain tribes, California, population of, I, 520
Wild-Oat Indians. *See* Folle Avoine.
Wild olive, use of, by Indians, III, 114
Wild rice, gathering of, III, 62–63
    illustrated, III, 63; VI, 553
  importance of, IV, 57
  in Minnesota, I, 186–187
  Indian names for, I, 187
  preparation, for food, III, 63
Wild Rice Men, a name for the Menominee, v, 145
Wilkes, Capt. C., v, 101
  crania collected by, v, 287
  population estimated by, v, 705
Wilkes, J. A., Jr., work of, IV, 526, 527
Wilkinson, Capt. James, IV, 629–630
Wilkinson, Col. James, force commanded by, VI, 335
Wilkinson, Gen. J., IV, 630
Willamets. *See* Willamette Indians.
Willamette, pronunciation of name, v, 664
Willamette Indians (Willamets), classification of, III, 402
  population, I, 521; VI, 701
  See also Cathlacumups.
Willard, Capt., land granted to, v, 235
Willetpos, population of, v, 706
  See also Cayuse.
Willet(t), Colonel, at battle of Oriskany
  expedition accompanied by, VI, 306
  perilous mission of, VI, 290
Willewah band, location of, III, 570
  population, III, 570; v, 706
Williams, Ben, Indian interpreter, IV, 345
Williams, Col., VI, 220
Williams, Eleazar, narrative from letter of, v, 511–512
Williams, Ezekiel, IV, 607
Williams, L. S., work of, IV, 545
Williams, Roger, influence of, VI, 125, 126
  Rhode Island, sold to, VI, 125
Williamson, Col., III, 294
Williamson, Col. D., expedition led by, VI, 317
Williamson, Thomas S., paper by, on the Dacotas, I, 247–256
  work of, IV, 547, 548, 549
Willopah. *See* Wheelappas.
Wilson, H. W., cited on oriental deities, v, 406
Wilson, J., report by, VI, 697
Wilson, J. Leighton, report on missions, v, 699

Wilson, William, report on the Choctaw, IV, 583–587
Winchester, General, defeat of, at River Raisin, III, 279; VI, 362
Wingenund, Chief, inscription recording exploits of, I, 414
Wingfield, Edward Maria, expedition joined by, VI, 96
Wingina, VI, 86
  death of, VI, 86
  relations with colonists, VI, 90, 91
  Roanoke Island chief, VI, 85
Winnabagoes. *See* Winnebagoes.
Winnebago language, publication in, IV, 549
  vocabulary (numerals), II, 214–216
Winnebagoes (Winnabagoes), VI, 375, 452, 632
  account of, III, 277–288; IV, 227–243
  affiliations, IV, 550
  Algonquin name, V, 41
  alliance with Menomonie, I, 304
  appropriation for, II, 564
  beliefs, IV, 238, 239, 240
  burial customs, IV, 54–55
  calendar system of, IV, 239–240
  census, I, 498–507; VI, 691, 704
  changes among, II, 534
  characteristics, III, 277
  classification, II, 37; III, 277, 402; VI, 206
  country occupied by, I, 53, 498; III, 277–278, 584, 593; IV, 227, 228, 236; VI, 34, 206, 385, 705
  cranial measurements, II, 335; III, 277
  creation myths, IV, 228–231
  depopulation of, III, 281
  divisions, I, 498
  east of Mississippi, V, 42
  fiscal statistics relating to, VI, 720, 721, 723
  friendly to the French, VI, 237
  funds required for, II, 566
  fur trade of, II, 527
  history, III, 277–282; IV, 231–232
  intemperance among, I, 435
  land, ceded by, II, 604; III, 280
    claimed by, III, 584
    purchased from, II, 593, 599, 600, 601
    statistics on, II, 606
  language, III, 283, 562
Winnebagoes—Continued
  leading men, III, 568; IV, 232–235
  linguistic affinities, I, 248
  manners and customs, IV, 51–59
  maps showing location, II, 137; III, 96
  medical practices, III, 497–498
  medicine animal of, II, 223–224
    illustrated, II, 225
  medicine feast of, III, 286–288
  mental capacity, III, 277
  migration legend, V, 98
  missionary work among, V, 699; VI, 734, 735
  name, derivation of, III, 277
    Indian names for, IV, 227
    synonyms for, III, 562
  named as one of "Seven Fires," II, 169
  numeral system, V, 244
  picture writing among, I, 338
  population, III, 282–283, 562, 584, 593, 609, 610; IV, 228; V, 708; VI, 271, 689, 704, 705, 707
  portage rights, claimed by, VI, 422
  relations with American government, III, 280–281
    with other tribes, III, 277, 278, 566
    with the English, III, 278–279
    with the French, III, 278
  removal, III, 282; IV, 235; VI, 488, 497, 505
    difficulty in, II, 551
    mistakes in, IV, 485–486
  retreat before Algonquins, II, 37
  rulers of, VI, 386
  skull of, illustrated, II, 324
  standing of, among tribes, IV, 235–236
  territory assigned to, IV, 464
  trade of, III, 564
  trading post of, III, 566
  tradition of, III, 266–268
    origin, IV, 147–148, 227, 228
  treaties with, V, 499, 500; VI, 380, 421
  tribes descended from, III, 278; IV, 227
  villages, number of, III, 562
  war customs, IV, 51–54

Winnebagoes—Continued
  warriors, estimate of, III, 556, 562; VI, 271
  wigwams, II. 80
  See also Ounepigous; Hochungara; Puans.
Winnecowetts, derivation of name, V, 223
  members of Pennacook Confederacy, V, 223
Winnebeegoshish, former name of Cass Lake, VI, 384
Winnepesaukee. *See* Winnepesaukies.
Winnepesaukee River, Indian fishing on, V, 225, 226
Winnepesaukies (Winnepesaukee), derivation of name, V, 222
  lands occupied by, V, 222
  subservient to Pennacooks, V, 222
Winoca, cave described, IV, 306
  meaning of name, IV, 306
Winslow, Josiah, Indian warfare commanded by, VI, 162–163
Wiondots. *See* Wyandots.
Wisagechroanu, explanation of the name, IV, 605
  warriors, IV, 605
  See also Missisaugies.
Wisconsin, population and area, IV, 610
Wisconsin River, Indians on, VI, 385
Wisconsins. *See* Ouisconsins.
Wise, Hon. Henry A., information furnished by, V, 36
Wiser, Conrad, census gathered by, IV, 605
  comments on character of, IV, 617–618
  knowledge of Iroquois language, IV, 616, 618
  narrative of journey of, IV, 324–341
Wish-osk, name of Humboldt Bay Indian, III, 133
  origin of name, III, 422
  See also Walla-walloo.
Wish-osk language, vocabulary of, III, 434–440
Wishtenatin, census of, V, 492
Wiskin, a Shoshonie chief, VI, 697
Wisner, Col., murder of, VI, 298–307
Witchcraft, discussion of belief in, III, 483–485; IV, 489–497; V, 415–441
  illustration showing practice of, V, 32
Witchcraft—Continued
  practice among Chippewas, V, 32
  See also Demonology; Sorcery.
Witches, power of, IV, 408
Witchetaws. *See* Wichitas.
Witchita language, vocabulary of, V, 709–711
Witchitas. *See* Wichitas.
Wits-puk, a Trinity River village, III, 139
Wiweakam. *See* Wewarkkum.
Wiwekae. *See* Weewark ka.
Wiyandotts. *See* Wyandots.
Wiyat. *See* Wee-yot.
Wiyondotts. *See* Wyandots.
Wizards, classification of, II, 224
Woccoa (Waccoa) language, relation to Catawba, III, 292
  vocabulary of, V, 552–556, 557–558
Woccons (Woocons), classification of, II, 343
  language of, extinct, III, 401
  See also Woccoa language.
Wococon, English landing at, VI, 83
Woksoyudshi. *See* Wacksoyochees.
Wolcott, Oliver, Indian commissioner, VI, 323
Wolf, James, division of Chickasaw, I, 508
Wolf dance, described, V, 683
Wolf Town, census of, I, 508–517
Wolfe, Gen., capture of Quebec by, VI, 234
  death of, VI, 234
Wollahwollah (Wollawollah). *See* Walla-wallas.
Women, activities of, II, 63–64
    illustrations of, V, 217; VI, 561
  average number of children of, III, 95
  Aztec, labor of, IV, 444
  burdens borne by, II, 76
  condition among Kenistenos, V, 167
  conduct at feasts, II, 75
  Creek, clothing of, V, 275
  cruel treatment by Chippewyans, V, 174
  Dacota, chastity of, II, 197
  Dacotah, illustrations showing, III, 236
  diseases of, treatment of, I, 252
  effect of hardship on, IV, 350; VI, 562

- Women—Continued
  - exclusion at ceremonies, V, 171, 268
    - from councils, II, 184
  - influence, II, 184
  - labor, I, 46, 81, 91, 285; II, 188, 515; IV, 221–222
    - illustrated, II, 183
  - masculine manner toward, V, 183
  - offer of, to visitors, III, 190
  - physical traits, IV, 350
  - population affected by status of, I, 268–269
  - respect for chastity of, IV, 53
  - results of mode of life of, III, 211–212
  - riding customs, V, 210
  - rights in council, I, 277
  - sitting posture, III, 236; V, 182
  - status among Comanches, I, 235–236; II, 131
    - among Creeks, V, 272–273
    - among Iroquois, III, 195–196
  - treatment, by Apaches, V, 212
  - wigwam controlled by, II, 63
  - *See also* Childbirth; Family life; Fecundity; Labor; Marriage customs; Widows; Virgins.
- Wonnesquam, orgin of name, V, 221
- Woocons. *See* Woccons.
- Wood, implements of, I, 78; II, 516
- Wood carving, illustration showing, III, 468
  - *See also* Utensils; Wood.
- Woodcraft of the Indians, II, 54; III, 245
- Woodford, O. L., report by, on Cherokee schools, IV, 589–590
- Woods, John, mounds on land of, V, 665–666
- Woods, Col. Sarshel, III, 155, 163, 167, 168, 173
- Worcester, Rev. S. A., data by, on Cherokee missions, IV, 588
  - paper by, on Cherokee language, II, 443–456
  - translations by, IV, 543
- Words of Indian origin, list of, with meanings, V, 535–542
- Work. *See* Labor.
- Worship, places of, of nomadic tribes, I, 50
- Wo-so-keek, celebrated Shoshoni warrior, V, 199
- Wosta, VI, 74
- Wounds, treatment of, I, 253–254; II, 180; III, 363–364; IV, 243, 508, 513–514
- Wox e micco, chief at Che wok o lee (Eufaula), IV, 580
- Wozencraft, Commissioner, population estimated by, VI, 705
- Wrentham, Mass., Indians killed at, VI, 160
- Wright, Rev. A., work of, IV, 528
- Wrist-bands. *See* Bracelets.
- Writing. *See* Inscriptions; Letters; Picture writing.
- Wush-ush-ko-con, chief of Mille Lac band, II, 163
- Wyalusing, Delawares at, V, 138
- Wyampam, population of, I, 521; VI, 702
- Wyandot language, vocabulary of (numerals), II, 218–220
- Wyandot stock. *See* Huron.
- Wyandot story of Trapping in Heaven, III, 320–322
- Wyandots (Wayondotts, Wiandots, Wiondots, Wiyandotts, Wiyondotts, Wyandotts), VI, 260, 488
  - allies of the French, IV, 198
  - and others, battle with, VI, 266
  - annuities of, II, 588
  - appeal to Andastes, VI, 139
  - armistice granted to, VI, 364
  - arrival in Lake region, VI, 204
  - at Braddock's defeat, VI, 217, 218
  - brief account of, III, 560
  - census, I, 441–457; III, 621–628
  - classification, III, 401
  - Delaware massacre avenged by, V, 139
  - driven west by Six Nations, II, 139
  - enemies of the Iroquois, III, 518, 519
  - expulsion from St. Lawrence Valley, VI, 201
  - fiscal statistics relating to, VI, 721, 722, 723
  - flight before the Iroquois, V, 143
  - fortification built by, V, 110
  - funds required for, II, 575
  - general condition, IV, 466
  - history, IV, 382–383
  - hostile to English, VI, 237
  - hunting grounds, VI, 714
  - identical with Hurons, V, 495
  - lands, ceded by, II, 604

Wyandots—Continued
    lands—Continued
        claimed by, III, 583, 584; VI, 330
        purchased from, II, 593, 598, 600, 601
        statistics on, II, 606
    legend of, II, 235
    location, I, 441; II, 37; III, 559, 583, 584, 590; IV, 461; V, 495; VI, 275. 301, 705, 714
    maps, showing colony of, IV, 180
        showing location, III, 96; VI, 519
    migrations, V, 41, 521
    missionary work among, VI, 737, 738, 739, 740
    numeral system, V, 244
    of Iroquois stock, II, 37
    part taken by, in Pontiac's conspiracy, VI, 246
    peace made by, V, 139; VI, 254, 343
    population of, III, 583, 584, 585, 590, 610; V, 495, 708; VI, 272, 275, 689, 705, 714
    relations with Five Nations, I, 197; VI, 200–201
        with the French, V, 522
        with the Iroquois, II, 85
    removal, V, 495; VI, 515, 516, 536
        plans for, III, 576, 577
    result of flight of, VI, 201
    school attendance, IV, 477
    totems, III, 554
    treaties with, V, 497, 499; VI, 327, 330, 334, 380
    war on, by Iroquois, V, 137
    warriors, estimate of, III, 554, 559, 560; VI, 261
    See also Hurons; Wantats.
Wyanokes, included in Monacan dialects, III, 292
Wycomeses, VI, 143
    See also Wicomocos.
Wyeth, John, drawings made by, II, 23
Wyeth, Nathanial J., brief sketch of, I, 203
    letters of, on Shoshonean Indians, I, 204–228
Wyllis, Major, death of, VI, 331
Wyoming massacre, allusions to, V, 671, 672
    discussion of events concerning, V, 672–673
    question concerning, IV, 345, 346
Wysockton, former name of Wysox, V, 670
Wyth, Mr., expedition accompanied by, VI, 85
Wythlacooche River, massacre near, VI, 469–470

X

Xabe, guide for the Spaniards, IV, 29
Xaragua, Province of, described, II, 309
Xolotl, beginning of reign of, VI, 742
Xolotol, sacrifices to, V, 103

Y

Yacaawa. *See* Yacaws.
Yacamas, population of, VI, 702
Yacaws (Yacaaws, Yackaws), location of, VI, 689
    population, I, 521; III, 632; VI, 689
    See also Cutsahnim; Yakamas.
Yachamsee, chief of the Sisticoosta, VI, 702
Yackaws. *See* Yacaws.
Yackimas. *See* Yakamas.
Yagowanea (Yogowanea), queen of the Eries, IV, 198; VI, 148
    tradition of, IV, 199–201; V, 643–644
    treachery of, VI, 148
    See also Gegosasa.
Yahach. *See* Youitts.
Yahshute (Yah Shutes), a Rogue River band, VI, 702
    census, V, 493; VI, 702
    chief of, VI, 702
    classification, VI, 702
    location, VI, 702
    population, VI, 702
    See also Yasuchahs.
Yaka, Huron chief, at siege of Detroit, II, 242, 243, 248
Yakai and others, estimated population of, III, 634
Yakama River, earthworks on, V, 101; VI, 612
Yakama Valley, earthworks of, V, 665
Yakamas (Yackimas), fortifications erected by, VI, 613
    location of, V, 490
    maps showing location, III, 96, 200
    population, III, 632; V, 490, 705, 706, 707; VI, 700
    See also Cutsahnim; Yacaws.

Yakima. *See* Cutsahnim; Yacaws; Yakamas.
Yaltasse, location of, III, 585
  population, III, 585
  See also Yattapo.
Yam, use by Oregon tribes, V, 80
Yamacraws, foes of Creeks, V, 98
Yamas. *See* Yamasees.
Yamasees (Yamas, Yamases, Yamassees, Yemassees), absorbed by Creeks, VI, 370
  classification, II, 344
  country occupied by, II, 36; VI, 31-32
  foes of the Creeks, V, 98
  hostilities of, reference to, VI, 193
  identification, VI, 185
  independence in warfare, VI, 199-200
  kidnapped by Vasquez de Ayllon, II, 35-36
  massacre by, reference to, VI, 185
  missionary work among, VI, 734, 735
  subordinate tribe of the Catawbas, VI, 179
  war against colonists, VI, 158
Yamases (Yamassees). *See* Yamasees.
Yambadika. *See* Yumpatickara.
Yamel. *See* Yam Hill Indians.
Yam Hill Indians, population of, I, 521; VI, 689, 701
Yampa. *See* Yampatick-ara.
Yampah, Shoshonee name for Little Bear River, I, 226
Yam-pai-o (Yampais), a division of the Yuma, II, 116
  location, II, 116
    map showing, IV, 24
  See also Yavipais.
Yampais. *See* Yam-pai-o.
Yampapas, a division of the Utahs, VI, 697
  population, VI, 697
Yamparacks (Yamparecks), a Comanche band, I, 230; V, 575
  region occupied by, I, 230
Yampaticara, classification of, VI, 689
  location, VI, 689
Yampatick-ara, a Shoshonee division, I, 198
  description, I, 198-199
  identified as Bonacks, I, 198
Yampatick-ara—Continued
  meaning of name, I, 260
  territory of, I, 198
Yanctonas (Yanctons, Yanctonwas). *See* Yankton.
Yankton (Yanctonas, Yanctons, Yanctonwas), VI, 695
  census, VI, 556
  classification, III, 402
  country inhabited by, III, 629; V, 494; VI, 556, 695
  Dakotah band, VI, 350
  divisions, II, 169; III, 629
    of the Sioux, II, 169; III, 612, 629
  identification, VI, 689
  language spoken by, III, 563
  leading men, III, 569, 629
  nickname of, IV, 559
  other names for, III, 563
  population, III, 563; V, 494; VI, 689 695
  trade of, III, 564
  warriors, number of, III, 563
  See also Ihanktonwan; Yanton Dakotahs.
Yankton, Teton, and Cheyenne Sioux, population of, VI, 707
Yanktonai. *See* Eyank-ton-wah; Yanktonas.
Yanktonas (Yank-ton-ees, Yanktonnan, Yank-ton-us), a division of the Sioux, III, 629
  divisions, III, 629
  leading men, III, 629
  population, V, 494
  territory occupied by, II, 169; III, 629; V, 494
  Yankton band, II, 169
Yank-ton-ees. *See* Yanktonas.
Yanktonnan. *See* Yanktonas.
Yank-ton-us. *See* Yanktonas.
Yanton Dakotahs, treaty made by, VI, 421
  See also Yankton.
Yaocomicos, account of, VI, 128
  classification, VI, 128
  location, VI, 128
Yaquina. *See* Jacons; Youikcones.
Yarmouth, Indians at, I, 287
Yasuchahs (Yasuchans), maps showing location of, III, 96, 200
  See also Yahshute.

Yatasi. *See* Yaltasse; Yattapo.
Yattapo, country occupied by, III, 596
  population, III, 596
  See also Yaltasse.
Yau-terrh, a Klamath River tribe, III, 634
  Klamath River village, III, 138
Yavapai. *See* Yam-pai-o; Yavipais.
Yavipais, reference to, III, 297, 298
Yazoos, missionary work among, VI, 734, 735
Yehuh, a Shahalah tribe, III, 570
  location of, III, 570
Yeletpo band, location of, III, 570
  population, III, 570
  See also Cayuse; Waulatpus.
Yellow-Gown, The, a noted Pillager, V, 189
Yellow Head, Chief, I, 145
Yellow-hunter, a Comanche chief, II, 128
Yellowstone River, tribe living on, VI, 556
Yellow Wolf, a Comanche chief, III, 635
Yemassees. *See* Yamasees.
Yepiti, basket press, described, IV, 444–447
  illustrated, IV, 456
Ynca-stone, mirrors made of, V, 91–92
Yochem, Jacob, IV, 315
Yoghagany, origin of name, VI, 176–177
Yogowanea. *See* Yagowanea.
Yo ho lo har jo, chief at Che hawah, IV, 580
Yoholo micco, a Creek chief, IV, 576
Yohter. *See* Yau-terrh.
Yokaia. *See* Yukai.
Yoqueechaes (Youqueechaes), maps showing location of, III, 96, 200
  See also Euquachee; Yuquache.
Yo-semety Indians, capture of, IV, 222
Yo-semety Valley, description of, IV, 222–223
Yosemite. *See* Yo-semety Valley.
You ah noe, census of, V, 489
  language, V, 489
  location, V, 489
Youikcones, location of, III, 571
  population, III, 571
  See also Jacons.
Youitts, location of, III, 571
  population, III, 571
Young, Gov., extract from letter on, IV, 596–597
Young King, Chief, annuity of, II, 585
Youqueechaes. *See* Yoqueechaes.
Youruk, application of name, III, 151
Youtas. *See* Yutas.
Yo-woc-o-nees, language spoken by, V, 712
  location, V, 712
  See also Tawakoni.
Ystete, language of, V, 689
  See also Isleta.
Yubas, location of, VI, 710
  population, VI, 710
Yubuincariri. *See* Jumbuicrariri.
Yucatan, antiquities of, VI, 582
  discovery of, III, 27
Yuchi. *See* Euchee; Savanuca; Uchees; Utchees.
Yuf kar e marth lar har jo, a Thlakatchka chief, IV, 579
Yu-kai, a band on Russian River, III, 421
  treaty made with, III, 112
  vocabulary obtained from, III, 112
Yukai language, vocabulary of, III, 428–434
Yukichetunne. *See* Euquachee; Yoqueechaes; Yuquache.
Yuma language, vocabulary of, II, 118–121
Yumanos. *See* Humanos.
Yumas, description of, II, 110
  disposition of, II, 118
  divisions, II, 115–116
  facial painting, V, 214
  maps showing location, III, 96; IV, 24
  missionary work among, VI, 734
  number at mouth of Gila, II, 103
  numeral system, V, 244
  religion, II, 117
  See also Cuchans; Garoteros; Umahs.
Yumpatick-ara, population of, I, 522
Yupu. *See* Yubas.
Yuqua Creek, Indians of, VI, 702
Yuquache, location of, VI, 702
  population, VI, 702
  See also Euquachee; Yoqueechaes.
Yuque-Yunque, identification of, IV, 39
  visited by Spaniards, IV, 39
Yurok. *See* Weits-pek; Youruk.

Yutas (Youtas), i, 219; iii, 297
  brief account of, i, 244
  location, vi, 689
  population, i, 244, 245; vi, 689

Z

Zacatecas, antiquities in, vi, 581
Zander, William, missionary labors of, v, 680
Zantees, a synonym for Santees, iv, 155
Zea maize. *See* Corn.
Zeisberger, David (Rev.), grammar by, of Lenno Lenape, ii, 357
  translation by, iv, 540
Zesuqua. *See* Tesuque.
Zha-ba-ties, assistance in interpretation, i, 113
Zilly-Quachne, identified as Sunbury, iv, 325
Zinzendorf, Count, doctrine of, v, 138
  daughter of, v, 681
  erroneous policy of, vi, 299
Zinzendorf—Continued
  mission founded by, v, 503; vi, 264
  missionary work of, v, 680–681; vi, 734
  welcomed by Shikelimo, iv, 617
Zizania palustris. *See* Wild rice.
Zoroaster, doctrines of, i, 30, 31, 32
Zuñi Indians, iii, 297
  description of, iv, 220–221
  language of, iv, 81; v, 689
  location, vi, 689
  peculiar weaving of, iv, 81
  population, vi, 689, 709
  vocabulary, iv, 416–429
Zuñi pueblo, iv, 216; v, 107
  defenses of, iv, 81
  description, iv, 80–81
  illustration of, iv, 24
  population, i, 519; iii, 633; v, 484
  possibly Cibola, iv, 220–221
  See also Old Zuñi.

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